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JONATHAN.

A Novel.

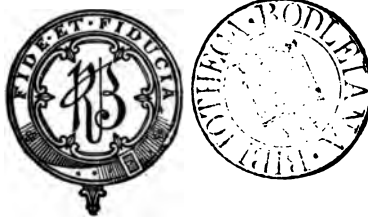
BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1876.

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251. d. 360.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. EASTER EVE - - - -	1
II. ANDREW - - - -	13
III. AN EVENING WALK, WITH CLOUDS -	22
IV. FAIRER WEATHER - - -	32
V. THE GREEN BAY TREE - - -	42
VI. THROUGH FIELDS IN MAY - -	53
VII. AN ESCORT - - - -	63
VIII. SILVER SPEECH - - - -	73
IX. GOLDEN SILENCE - - - -	81
X. JUST WHEN THE RED JUNE ROSES BLOW -	91
XI. A GALA DAY - - - -	100
XII. TOWARDS EVENING - - - -	112
XIII. "PIMPERNELS DOZING" - - -	127
XIV. A CRISIS - - - -	136
XV. ANDREW'S DREAM - - - -	148
XVI. IN THE FORGE - - - -	159
XVII. "IS IT AY, OR NO?" - - -	171
XVIII. COUNTING THE COST - - -	182
XIX. "THERE IS A TIDE IN THE AFFAIRS OF MEN" -	192
XX. JAEL'S MESSAGE - - - -	203

CHAP.	PAGE
XXI. THE BREAK OF DAY - - -	- 216
XXII. DAPHNE'S AWAKING - - -	- 227
XXIII. TROUBLE AND TOIL - - -	- 234
XXIV. MR. MAY'S MANDATE - - -	- 243
XXV. FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH - - -	- 253
XXVI. THE LANE THAT HAD A TURNING -	- 262
XXVII. THE BREWER'S RETURN - - -	- 274
XXVIII. THE GATES OF DEATH - - -	- 283
XXIX. SILVER LINING - - -	- 296
XXX. THE LOVE THAT STOOPED - - -	- 312
XXXI. THE LOVE THAT SOARED - - -	- 321



JONATHAN.

CHAPTER I.

EASTER EVE.



EARLY on the Saturday morning, Eliza Ann's powers as parlour-maid, or porter, were tested. Perhaps she savoured most of the latter, to judge by the clatter and tramp, anything but feminine, that heralded her approach through the little lobby, to open the door.

To it had come Jonathan Cleare, the blacksmith.

As he passed the window, he could not help seeing Miss Lynn moving about in the sunny parlour, preparing a neatly-laid breakfast on a little tray.

The sun was shining on the smooth brown hair, drawn from her face, and twisted round her head in a way that spoke both of care and of carelessness. Care to be scrupulously neat and clean, carelessness as to what set the large twists of hair took, or how their arrangement might be most becoming. Not that Jonathan dissected the motives of the schoolmistress in this fashion. He only knew it was the face of the grey bonnet on Sundays, the face he had seen flushed from teaching in the school, bonnetless now, and fresh as a new-blown rose in the early morning.

Daphne was circumspect. Her mother never came down to breakfast: and she would not, therefore, ask Jonathan Cleare to come in. Besides, she and her mother

had decided, when they came to Shelbourne, that they would "keep to themselves."

She could not be quite sure that they had kept to their resolve, when she remembered the great luncheon at Mr. Falk's, and one or two visits to the cottagers when they were in trouble, and when she saw the young blacksmith waiting at the door for her orders about the church decoration. But after all, how much pleasanter life had become both to her and to her mother since they had innocently infringed the rigour of their rule !

She went out to speak to Jonathan, trusting the tray, with her mother's breakfast, to Eliza Ann.

"Good-morning, ma'am," said Jonathan. "I came along to see what I could do for you. My mother understood you to say you wanted me here on Saturday—that's to-day?"

"Wanted you here ? O no!" said Daphne.

And then, seeing Jonathan colour; she coloured too, at her own awkward speech.

“I mean I should not have thought of troubling you, only Mr. May said you could put some wire across the window-sills in the church; and it was he that wished me to ask you to look in there to-day.”

“My mother’s very dull of hearing,” he answered—and Daphne could not help seeing that he showed ever so slightly that her first words had annoyed him—“and that’s how the mistake’s come. Perhaps Mr. May will let me know, then, when it is I am wanted.”

“When it is convenient to you to come to the church, I think. Some of the girls and I are going to put the flowers in, and we can do the windows any time before dark, that it suits you to come, Mr. Cleare.”

Jonathan coloured again, slightly. He was not used to be called Mr. Cleare. There had been a time when he looked something

like the name, and when strangers' lips had called him by it. But now he looked at his fingers soiled with iron rust, and at the broad palm that had grown hard from work, and then at his coat, mended indeed by the little mother at home, but looking worn as a blacksmith's coat must look—and it seemed to him that the neat, delicate, well-dressed schoolmistress was mocking him, when she called him Mr. Cleare. Mr. Cleare! why, in her eyes what else could he be but a great clumsy workman? And his eyes fell upon a pair of small white hands folded loosely before him, on a soft grey dress.

Jonathan knew Miss Lynn too little, or he was too proud to put his feelings into words. What could it matter what she thought of him, or what she called him? He was only the blacksmith, sent for to stretch wires in the church.

But Daphne was quick to read the human face, when that face was so honest as to wear

no mask, and to change with every shade of feeling. She saw that she had in some way wounded Jonathan's feelings. She would try to make him amends.

"I could come down in five minutes just to show you what is required," she said humbly, afraid of making another mistake. "Perhaps you will walk in, till I have put on my bonnet?"

Jonathan was hesitating, and on the point of refusing, when a crash as of lightning, thunder, and teacups silenced him.

Daphne gave a resigned sigh.

But following on the crash came a scream, which terrified her. It was her mother's voice. She fled upstairs as if she were on wings.

Little was to be seen of poor Mrs. Lynn, who lay, like Pompeii, buried in her own beauties. Daphne's little blue and white cups, given her by her father, the china teapot and cream-jug, everything, was either a

hopeless mass of bits upon the floor or upset upon the bed : and all over the poor blind woman's hands and arms the tea-pot had emptied itself. These hands, scalded and blistered, were the first things that Daphne saw. Mrs. Lynn was holding them up and wringing them helplessly over the débris of china and soaked bread and butter that surrounded her.

Daphne could not speak. She could not scold Eliza Ann, who stood there, sullen and stolid, saying and doing nothing. She felt she had only herself to blame ; she that had been deceiving herself into thinking she was charitable, and who had been sacrificing her nearest and dearest all the time to her own whim.

She was too distressed, too angry with herself to cry. But as she tied up her mother's hands tenderly with cold cream and a soft handkerchief, Mrs. Lynn could feel that she was trembling.

“Oh, mother!” she said once remorsefully, under her breath ; that was all.

It was like another being, the Miss Lynn who came quietly downstairs ten minutes later, followed by Eliza Ann in her hat and shawl. She was quite pale, and Jonathan could see she had been crying.

She did not seem to notice him, as she took hold of the sullen girl's hand, and led her gently to the door.

Jonathan saw her lay her hand on the thread-bare shawl, and then he saw a thing that almost took his breath away.

He could not hear what Miss Lynn said, nor did he try to listen ; but he saw her draw the sullen stolid face towards her, and kiss it.

And then the stolid look gave way, and the tears ran over the plain, hard face ; and the poor girl brushed her rough red hand across her eyes, and tramped out to the gate, letting it bang behind her.

Daphne Lynn stood a moment looking after her. Then she came in, closed the door, and sank wearily into a seat in the parlour.

“I forgave her everything,” she said at last, in a piteously sad tone—“everything that I could. She took my money and my clothes; she broke almost everything I had; and I thought if she only did not hurt my mother it would not matter. But I see now I have been deceiving myself, forgetting my duties at home, and trying to do charities abroad. I have no judgment. I am not fit to teach children. I ought to do plain sewing, to keep me quiet and in my right mind.”

“I’m glad you’ve sent her away,” said Jonathan, a little shyly. He was quite taken by surprise at being made the confidant of the woman that a few moments before he had thought was mocking him. This child-like distress, and the sudden expres-

sion of it, was what he never had expected from Miss Lynn. But he had learnt to know that every time he saw her, a new side of her character was unveiled. The side shown him to-day moved his heart strangely. He could enter somewhat into the bitterness of disappointed hopes : he was, at least, so much nearer her than he had been an hour ago, that he could pity her.

She saw his sympathy in his kind, honest face, though he did not attempt speech.

“ You have had trouble, too,” she said. “ I know you have had disappointments. I have heard how you might have been——” Something stopped her. She felt she was too much of a stranger to touch upon this man’s silent struggles and victories uninvited.

And Jonathan did not help her. He would have given a good deal for words just then, but they came to him so slowly.

Miss Lynn rose, and tied on her bonnet.

“ I am sorry to have kept you so long,” she said. “ We can go to the church now. And on the way, is there any one you could tell me of who would wait on my mother, now Eliza Ann is gone ?”

“ My mother could come in for to-day,” said Jonathan ; “ and afterwards there’s Martha Male ’ud do for you. Or, if it was only for an hour or two, there’s Jael Thorne; she can’t leave the old gentleman long together, but she’d be glad to earn a shilling any way she could.”

Jonathan went in to speak to his mother, while Miss Lynn walked on to the church. When she got there, she found the school-girls had not arrived ; but Mr. Falk was in the porch, and a great basket of cut flowers was swinging on Ben Brewer’s arm.

Daphne did not try to conceal her delight and gratitude for his generosity. But Aaron Falk’s services were not to end there.

When Jonathan reached the church, with

a wire and hammer in his hand, Aaron Falk was standing on steps, arranging the moss on the window-sills for Miss Lynn. Two school-girls beside her were tying primroses into bunches. Mrs. Myse was creeping about, all smiles, and contentment, and admiration.

“We needn’t keep you, thank you, Jonathan,” said Mr. Falk, from his eminence on the steps; “I can do all that is required here.”



CHAPTER II.

ANDREW.




WITH warmer days, and perhaps because a long time had now passed since his leg was broken, Andrew Male took to regular work again.

This in itself helped him to regain strength, and the second and the third week he felt much less tired than the first ; and so the old routine of the labourer's life began for him anew.

But he was an altered man for all that, and all his mates knew it. He had always been steady and hardworking, not given to

“larks,” as they called it ; but his had always been the merriest laugh when a joke went round, and the clearest whistle that came from the plough as it turned up the deep furrows, was the tuneful whistle of Andrew ; and though he was not tall like Jonathan, he could show a chest and a pair of stout arms against any man.

Now, he seldom seemed to hear a joke, or if he did, he smiled grimly and said nothing. He followed the plough first, and later the drill and the harrow, in silence, dragging himself along in a half-weary half-lazy way that was new to him. He stooped too, which made the broad chest look narrower ; and the men he worked with could make nothing of him. The little boys who guided the plough while he led the horse, often had a sharp word thrown to them, and his temper seemed to vary continually : from sullen hard work to moody idleness, no one knew which way, as they expressed it, the “fit



would take him." Some evenings he worked on an hour after the other men had gone home ; on other days he asked the time, or watched the sun going down in the sky continually ; and at the first stroke of the hour that ended the labourer's day, he would fetch his coat and wallet, and tramp off hurriedly towards home.

"Not as he got nothin' to do when he gits here," said his mother—"but gurn over the fire, or stand in the doorway wi' his hands in his pockets."

It was a time when any man with a tendency—from whatever cause—to drink, would have become a constant visitor to the Red Inn. Happily Andrew had no leaning that way, inherited from father or from mother, and his own tastes would never lead him to it. He could take a pint of beer at the inn like other men, but he knew when to stop better than they did. And it never occurred to him that the company at the

tap-room, or the beer to be found there, would minister to his trouble ; rather he shrank from the company, and took his pint at home.

As the days grew longer, and the evenings less cold, the fireside was more and more left for the doorway. There, in the gloaming, he stood sometimes for hours, watching the darkness stealing over the village, and feeling the hush that evening in country places brings with it. He found some strange comfort in it ; the twilight and the stillness were more in keeping with his frame of mind than the happier light and sound of day.

At those times his very trouble grew dim and indistinct. A sense of injury, of grievous wrong done to him, clung about him still. But the ignorance and uncertainty he was in could leave little room for such active feelings as hatred or the desire for revenge. Hate whom ? He knew not.

Only, therefore, to the world about him his dull sullen hate went out.

On such nights, Jonathan going from the forge to his cottage often passed him by. Sometimes he saw Andrew in the doorway, and then he would always come towards the garden gate and ask him how he did. The time was over for Andrew's questionings. Jonathan felt that, and had nothing to fear in facing his mate ; and Andrew could not help seeing that Jonathan feared nothing : that he looked him full in the face when they met ; that he did all in his power to drive away the cloud that hung between them.

And yet the cloud hung there : and Andrew could not dispel it. He sometimes longed for one word from Jonathan that he could lay hold of, one awkward look, one sign that now as before his mate avoided him. Then he would have it out, for better or for worse. Then he should know for

certain, either that what he dreaded was true, or that his friend was true.

But accuse Jonathan of so foul a deed, when he looked at him like that ; when he came out of his way to speak cheerily to him ; when his face wore the innocence of a two years old child, coupled with the strength of purpose of a man—how was it possible ?

Andrew felt it was not possible, and yet his mother's words came back to him, a thousand mocking echoes seemed to lend their horrid help to his suspicion, and he must keep silence.

In the bitterness of his soul he cried out often, like the troubled psalmist, " How long, O Lord, how long ? "

For little 'Scilla, his poor 'Scilla of past days—he knew she was happy. Jael had told him that she had been to see her once, and that she was quite contented, having the child with her. Through the winter, when

coals were dear, and the wind bitter, he often comforted himself thinking that she would fare better even in the workhouse than in old Josiah's home, where food and firing were ever scanty. And though perhaps he hardly knew it, his feeling towards 'Scilla was not quite, could not be quite, what it had been. Something stood between her and him, like the something that stood between him and Jonathan. But in the one case it was the dread suspicion : in the other it was the thought of that child—the child that 'Scilla loved. She had never loved him, surely : and yet she had love somewhere, it seemed, after all. Not that he wished anything away from her that brought her contentment. It was from the very depth of his love that he was able to find comfort in the knowledge that she, at least, did not suffer.

But now as the spring came on, and the sounds of piping thrushes and chattering

starlings, and the sight of primroses opening in the copses, and ferns unrolling their tender green heads in the hedge-rows—as all these things came back to earth and to him, there came also, keen and fresh, the remembrance of last year's spring, and of Scilla's happy child-like delight and wonder at what seemed now to Andrew to be returning to a blind and thankless world.

The new life abroad and stirring seemed to have come into his being : but only to change the dull numbed pain of winter for the pain of returning consciousness. He had thought little of primroses and singing birds before : now he knew by the trouble they brought him that they were bound up with the happiest moments of his life.

It is sad when nature says to a heart, young enough to suffer keenly, but too young to know how little meaning there is in those words—have been, are, and

shall be—that its happy moments are all past.

One soft still evening in May, when the weight of the newly-awakened pain was pressing at its heaviest on Andrew's spirit, Jonathan came across from the forge.

“You'll walk with me a bit, won't you, 'Drew?” he said, with his hand upon the gate; “it's such a wonderful fine ev'ning.”

Any change must be a relief. Andrew followed his friend on to the road, and across the village green, with his hands in his pockets.

He had a strange hope that something might come of that walk, some light upon the darkness.

If any man had called him at that moment, he would have come as he did at Jonathan's bidding, if only to get away from himself and his miserable thoughts.



CHAPTER III.

AN EVENING WALK, WITH CLOUDS.



HEY walked on in silence for some little time. There could not but be a certain embarrassment, now that the two friends so long estranged found themselves each alone in the company of the other.

Jonathan, perhaps, was most conscious of this, because with him there was no other consciousness to overpower it. Andrew knew more than that they had been long estranged ; he felt that there had been a cruel cause for it. Why he was in Jonathan's

presence now, he could not tell. The same mist of uncertainty and suspense he had so long lived in enfolded him still. And yet, he felt as if some mysterious decree of fate led him on to-night.

It is at these times of absolute powerlessness that we best realise that power that we call (too often irreverently) Providence. We are not leading ourselves ; some one else has taken us by the hand.

"Where are you goin'?" he asked, indifferently, as Jonathan, having crossed the green, directed his steps toward the churchyard.

"Only going to look in," was the answer. "It looks like summer having the wire doors shut, and the others left open."

"It needs air, the church does," said Andrew. "It's wonderful damp o' Sundays."

"Yes, if the Squire never did us another good turn he did us that one. They must have cost a deal of money, those gates."

They found the churchyard gate locked. But Jonathan threw his long legs over the railings without difficulty, and 'Drew, with less ease, followed him.

There was a high mild wind blowing ; the moon was nearly at the full, and set in a deep grey sky. Drifts of white cloud hurried over her face continually, and when they passed beneath her, she shed a dull red light upon their outer edge. Here and there, out of bays of deep grey, a bright star twinkled. The elms in the churchyard were waving lazily in the night wind.

Jonathan pressed his face against the wires, and looked into the church. A flood of silver light was pouring in. It fell upon the moss on the window sills, and upon the shapes of delicate feathery fronds of ferns leaning against the glass ; and out of the moss there looked white blossoms, vividly white as they caught the moonlight in the

dark building. The knight with his visor down was sleeping in the shadows, and the little harmonium sat in darkness, just the white edges of the hymn-books upon it showing through the gloom.

“The church was never noticed like that before,” said Andrew. “The schoolmissus is very handy, I take it : she done it all, so folks say.”

“She did all the tasty part,” said Jonathan ; “I helped her to stick on some of the moss, and such rough work as that.”

“I thought Mr. Falk done that,” Andrew said, indifferently, turning away ; “all the folk were chattering about him and her making a match of it, and that. I didn’t take any count of it, but I thought it like enough. It ’ud be a good match for the schoolmissus.”

Jonathan kicked a large stone, half buried in the grass, and sent it spinning to the gate. Then he said—

“ Folks said right, and I said right too. Mr. Falk put up the moss at Easter ; and I put it up at Whitsun; and that’s the rights of it, if anyone wants to know.”

“ You needn’t take offence,” said ’Drew wearily. What could it matter to him, who put the moss in the church ? He had other thoughts to trouble him.

“ I’d like to go round the shrubbery at the Place,” he said, as they left the churchyard ; “ it’s so light, everyone can see who it is, and we can’t do no harm going.”

They walked up the approach, and struck off to the right of the big white house, past the place where the bed of daffodils grew earlier in the year, and into the deserted, neglected grounds.

“ I’ve not been here ever so long, have you ?” said Jonathan.

Andrew threw up his head, and said, “ I’ve not been here since—not since April

twelvemonth. She brought me here to help her carry the Lenten lilies as Mr. Myse let her pick."

"Do you mean 'Scilla?" asked Jonathan.

"Who else?" he answered, as if there were but one woman in the world.

Andrew was longing to pour out his heart, as in the old days, to his friend. He looked quickly into Jonathan's face, when he said, "Do you mean 'Scilla?" Jonathan was looking at him just as in times past; there was not a trace of consciousness written there, not even the embarrassment that their long silence upon that subject might have made quite natural. In his friend's presence, the horrid fears, the hateful suspicion that had haunted Andrew of late, melted away. He forgot for a time that he had ever felt them.

"I daresay you think as I've forgotten about her. It's like enough. It seems so

easy sometimes to forget. But the thought of her's with me day and night. I can't away with it."

"I did think, may-be you were getting by it," said Jonathan, not knowing what else to say.

"It's not like as I ever shall, not till I know the rights or the wrongs of it for certain. To know as there's someone a-goin' about, who's the blackest enemy ever a man had ; and to know he's goin' scot free, and 'Scilla shut up between them work'us walls, all along o' him—it's a hard thing to bear, I tell'e, Jonathan ; and many's the time I think I won't bear it long. I don't see as I can, not much longer."

"Do you think it 'ud make it easier to bear if you knew?" said Jonathan, half frightened by Andrew's sullen, determined words, the full meaning of which he could not understand. If Andrew's life were to be consumed by the fire of this hopeless

searching for the truth, by this sullen hate that seemed to have turned in upon himself for want of the outlet of a natural indignation, Jonathan was not the one to sacrifice his friend, even for Jael and Josiah Thorne's comfort, still less for Aaron Falk's good name. Jael and Josiah would be provided for; the God of justice would see after them. And as for Aaron Falk—what was he doing to make Jonathan keep his black secret longer? What was he doing to deserve Jonathan's forbearance and silence so long? He would keep to his agreement; he would warn Aaron Falk first, and then tell Andrew.

To Andrew's keen ears, intent on finding out the truth somewhere, and alive to every change of expression or of tone, Jonathan had already betrayed himself. The way in which he had asked, "Do you think it would be easier to bear, if *you knew?*" carried to Andrew's heart the conviction that Jona-

than was not in the same darkness as himself.

He stood still, and faced him in the narrow shrubby walk.

“Jonathan, can you say before God that you don’t know who it is that I want to find—who it is that’s ruined her life and mine?”

Jonathan looked down. Andrew could hear his own heart beating above the rustling of the disturbed birds in the bushes, above “the dry-tongued laurel’s pattering talk” on either side.

“I can’t say so before God, nor yet before you, ’Drew. I wish to God I could.”

Andrew’s hand, that he had laid upon his friend’s shoulder, relaxed its grasp. They stood looking at one another, the clouds and the moonlight chasing each other, in light and shadow, over their troubled faces.

“Jonathan,” said Andrew, at last, “I never thought that you’d be able to raise

the devil in me. But you've done it, and you've to answer for it. If you're an honest man, why can't you give me an honest answer? But you'll give me an answer this time, or, though you're a bigger man than I am, and not broken with trouble, you'll not go out of this wood to-night. This is the question I've got to put to you—and if there's anythin' of the man left in you, you'll answer it;" he stretched his face forward, and looked full into his friend's eyes, as he said in a loud, strange whisper, "*Are you the man I want to find, Jonathan Cleare?*"



CHAPTER IV.

FAIRER WEATHER.



It is not always that nature attunes herself to man. She does not often weep when we weep, and smile when we smile. But sometimes, to our fancy, she becomes an omen of good or evil.

It was so on this fresh May evening, that saw Jonathan and Andrew face to face on the weed-grown shrubbery walk.

As Andrew, wrought by long trouble and suspense, wrung from himself the question that had lain so long upon his heart,

the last woolly rift of cloud passed over the pale moon, and a flood of soft white light, such as they had seen through the church windows, fell upon the path, the laurels, and upon Jonathan's face.

He hardly needed to answer; the answer was written there. Indeed, at first he could find no words. Pity for his friend and contempt for his base suspicion, strove together for the mastery. His eyes, full of a half-angry, half-sorrowful reproach, looked full into the eyes of Andrew.

It was Andrew's turn to look down now. Only the soft sighing of the wind in the tree tops, and the melancholy hoot of an owl on the chimney of the Place, broke the silence. Jonathan was the first to speak.

"Drew," he said, "I knew you were changed—not as you used to be. I knew you didn't care to come along with me, not as in the old times. But I thought all along

that it was because I wouldn't help you find out what you wanted."

He paused. Andrew was looking down still, and made no answer.

"But I see now," continued Jonathan, "that there's been another reason, I was going to say a better reason, but I'd best leave the 'better' unsaid. And I've got a question to put to you, and the question's this—If you thought of me, as it's plain enough you've been thinking — if you thought me the villain you did think me, how was it that you ever came nigh me again at all? How is it that you came out again with me this night, making believe to be friends with Judas, under the Almighty's sky? If you couldn't come to me like an honest man and ask me, long ago, why didn't you keep clear of me altogether?"

There was still silence. Plain-spoken simple Andrew could find no answer. He

could not analyse his thoughts and say that sometimes he had doubted his friend, and as often believed in him and hated himself: that sometimes his doubt had the mastery, and sometimes his faith. He felt ashamed, and yet he thought his mate was a little hard on him. He tried to think over the past months, to remember how it was that he had first suspected Jonathan, and how it was that he feared to face the man he suspected, and to know the truth. But the past months were all trouble, hesitation, gloom, uncertainty: he could unravel no thread from the tangled skein, he could not justify himself to his friend.

Jonathan began to turn homewards. Andrew followed him a few yards behind, still with his head down, trying to think.

At last he said—

“ I think it was just because you were my mate I didn’t like to face it out wi’ you. I was afraid it might be right, Jonathan, that

you were the man. But some days I didn't think it, because I couldn't—and I couldn't come to you, not then—how should I ? I think you're a bit hard on me, Jonathan, though I know as I've said a nasty thing to you to-night."

Jonathan had slackened his pace, and was walking beside him. They had got on to the approach again.

"May be, 'Drew, we've both been hard on each other. But I think it was you begun it to-night. If I'd thought you suspected——"

"Don't say it no more," said 'Drew, interrupting him ; "I don't want to hear of it no more. But there's this left that I'd like to set my mind at rest on. You told me you knew the man, and you'll tell me, I take it. I suppose you thought I'd take his life of him if you told me ; but now as I know it wasn't—it isn't—as I thought,—I think I could keep my hands off of him, if I'd once

got my mind set at rest. It's so long sin', and it can't be undone," he added, his voice falling.

He looked earnestly at his friend for an answer.

Jonathan thought a moment, and said—

"I'm bound by a promise, 'Drew, and I've been bound all along ; but if I'd known you thought so ill of me, I'd have been tempted——"

"Don't say no more o' that!" said Andrew, eagerly.

"No, I'll say no more. But as I'm bound, rightly or wrongly, I can't speak, though I sometimes wish I could. I've seen things o' late that have made me long to speak, not for your sake only, nor for mine ; but then I've thought again, perhaps it is myself at the bottom after all ; it's so easy deceivin' one's self when you've got any concern in a business ; and I'll have to hold my tongue, since I've given my word. And I

know if I spoke it 'ud be the ruin of more than one, and it couldn't do you any good."

Andrew was hanging upon his words. They had come to the lodge gate, and the church clock struck ten. Jonathan opened the gate.

"More than one?" repeated Andrew.

"I mean," said Jonathan, "that—" he hesitated, not knowing how to satisfy Andrew without betraying his secret—"that—if I speak, it'll ruin some you're concerned with, least some you care for; and it's for them mostly that we've—I've—kept silence, all along."

Jonathan had corrected his slip quickly, but not quickly enough for Andrew. "*We've* kept silence," he said to himself, and he thought perhaps this might be a key to other things, if he kept and pondered it a little. Some one else then knew, besides Jonathan.

They went across the green, and both

knew they were happier than when they had started for the walk in the shrubbery. Happier in so far that they were mates again, with faith in each other, and the thick cloud riven. It lifted a great weight off both their honest hearts that henceforward there need be no silence, and no estrangement.

"If I were rich like that man there," said Andrew, pointing to Aaron Falk's house, "I suppose I could find out all as I wanted, and get justice done. But they don't git in trouble like other folk," he added, unconscious that he was quoting the words the Hebrew Psalmist applied to the wicked in power.

Jonathan knew it, and could hardly suppress a bitter smile. 'Drew need not envy Aaron Falk, would have been his feeling two or three months ago. Now, he was not so sure of that. Position and money, a fair tongue and a greenhouse of flowers, could do great things in this world.

As they parted, Andrew said—

“ It’s all clear between us now, Jonathan. But I may as well tell you, since we’re all straightfor’ard together again, that though I’ll not get you to break your promise, I’ll leave no stone unturned to find out what you know. Good-night, lad.”

Jonathan went up to the forge, to take a last look at the fire, when he had left Andrew.

The lights werestill burning in the school-house parlour. Behind the blind Jonathan could see a plant in a pot upon the little table. He knew where that must have come from.

And with a leap of hope, Andrew’s last words came back to him.

Suppose it *were* found out at last, and without his breaking his promise ? Suppose the green bay-tree ceased suddenly to flourish after all ?

He tried to fling the thought from him.

What business had he to have such thoughts, and what could he have to do with the rich brewer's rise or fall?

He shut the ill-fitting door with a pull and a bang, and put the large rusty key in his pocket.



CHAPTER V.

THE GREEN BAY TREE.



ARON FALK was abroad too that night. A spirit of unrest had come upon him. He was leaning against his open door, watching the clouds and the moonlight, when Jonathan and Andrew passed by his gate, coming from the churchyard, and making their way towards the shrubbery at the Place.

He wondered, as idle men wonder, why they had gone to the churchyard at all; and thinking of that, an idea seemed to strike him, for he took his hat from a peg

and went out, up the little garden path and the damp stone steps, his private way to the church. A low gate at the top of the steps opened straight into the churchyard. All the graves except one were green ; that one had been there long enough to be green too, but the winter had been against the growing of grass, and still only a few charitable blades had come up over Mr. Byles's resting-place.

Strange to say, the grave came in and played its part in the train of thought with which he had started from his own door. He stood for a moment looking at it, thinking of the man who lay there, and his cheerless loveless life ; of the school-house as it used to be ; and of the school-house as it was now. He had been to tea at the school-house that afternoon, so the memory of it was fresh in his mind. And it was not the first time that Mrs. Lynn had asked him.

He passed the grave, and went on to the porch of the church. The fresh, soft wind was blowing in through the wire doors. The church was almost dark, the moon hidden for a while by white clouds: but he too looked to the window-sills, bedded in moss, and thought he saw white flowers in it. They were his flowers, he said to himself with quiet satisfaction. He had put such flowers in, with Miss Lynn, at Easter. Why had she not asked him at Whitsuntide? Not that he could have done it again; he had been to Hepreth on business instead. But still—why had she not asked him?

“Been to Hepreth,” said a thought like a voice. Aaron Falk tried to stifle it. He did not care to remember that he had been to Hepreth. For as he had passed the workhouse, the door of the women’s court had opened into the road, and two women had come out. One was grey-haired and

a stranger : the other was neither old nor a stranger. She was a beautiful girl, with a simple innocent childish face, and she carried an infant in her arms.

She looked at Aaron Falk, and he knew she did so. But she made no sign of recognition, though to Ben Brewer she probably did, for he said, " How are you, 'Scilla ?"

Aaron Falk drove on, and he had soon passed the women. But somehow the face of one followed him ; into Hepreth, into the bank, into the market : and as he drove home it followed him still.

And yet he had delayed and delayed his start till Ben's patience, which was not easily tried, began to give way. The brewer said to himself that he was waiting because he met old friends, because his business required it, because the wind would go down later. But his truer self knew he was waiting till the hour came when the women of the workhouse must be at home, when

he should be safe not to see the face again.

And to-night, more than twenty-four hours after, the face is following him still, though between it and him the face of Daphne Lynn had stood only an hour or two before.

It seemed to him that the one woman's face conjured up the other. As he thought of Miss Lynn, the recollection of 'Scilla hurried to him. As he thought of 'Scilla, with a pang of keen remorse—for Aaron Falk was not quite heartless—the face of Daphne swept in upon him.

The first face was beautiful and childish ; the second was to Aaron Falk the face of an angel.

But an angel of no peace.

That might have been, if the other face had not come between them. Now to think of Daphne was only less pain than to think of Priscilla Thorne. For the shadow of the

last pursued him : he knew that often he could not look into Miss Lynn's face because of it.

He turned from the porch, and the mark of men's footsteps on the path, and a furrow made by a stone that had been kicked along it, diverted his thoughts for a time.

Jonathan and Andrew Male. Why had they been walking together, and at night ? Were they fast friends again ? People had said there had been a coolness between them, and Aaron Falk had heard it well pleased. It was as well, considering Jonathan's promise, that he and Andrew Male should not be much together. Confidences sometimes oozed out when friends got together, however good and honourable their intentions might be.

And then—Jonathan Cleare had helped Miss Lynn in the church last Saturday. He, no doubt, had stretched the wire, and divided the sheets of moss, and done the

little services that at Easter he himself had done for her. And of course the blacksmith was the right person to do those things. Aaron Falk had no objection whatever to his doing it, if only—but it was a cogent “if”—if only nothing to Aaron Falk’s discredit, no covert hint, no unintentional slip as to his character, had dropped from the blacksmith’s lips.

Yet it was comforting to know that only Jonathan had helped the schoolmistress. Aaron Falk would have disliked it more, he said to himself, if some rival had taken his place. Ainger, the good-looking solicitor’s son at Hepreth, or some one equally dangerous.

And very soon he acknowledged to himself, that if the blacksmith were all he had to fear, he should do well. Jonathan had no object in speaking, and every reason for keeping silence. It was himself, and no other, that the brewer had to fear.

For it was his own consciousness, the remembrance of his own deeds, that made the haunting face so terrible to him, that made him fear too, and almost tremble, in the presence of Daphne Lynn.

He walked up and down the church-yard path, watching his own shadow and his own footsteps, but unconscious of both.

He was going over the past with keen remorse and bitter humiliation. How inexorable it was, that word "past." No undoing possible, no living over again, no washing out the stain.

It seemed hard. So few knew it; no more need ever know it. It did not seem likely they would, now that so many months had gone by safely.

But it was there all the same. Others might think the same of him as before. Money might flow in, and trade increase. And—a sweeter hope than any of these came


before him—even that was possible, very possible.

But the past could never be undone ; that must live for ever with him and die with him. The knowledge of it had made life tasteless to him for many long months already. And in his happiest moments, yes, in his better moments—for of these, too, he was conscious — the inexorable past would still stride in, and make his sweet bitter.

He had not suffered like this all the time, nor every day. He had looked at sin with other men's eyes, with the world's eyes, and pronounced it nothing—a mistake, a pity, an error.

He had put it from him by business, by sleep, by a hundred other means ; and, till of late, he thought he had out-lived it.

And what had come of late to him ? Just this. The face of a pure woman had come



into his life, and he knew to-day he loved her.

He had often wondered what real love could be. He knew now.

But it seemed hard that, with the sweetness of it, the dead past should start into life and torment him.

He walked till he grew cold and tired, and then he turned back to the little gate and the stone steps.

He started, as something white brushed past him with a gust of air. It was only the white owl from the bell-tower, going out on her nightly rounds.

He went into his silent house, lighted only by the moonlight. Groping for a match, he lit a candle, and went up to bed.

But he lay long awake, and said to himself that it was the moonlight that prevented sleep coming to him.

And this was the man that Andrew, as he

passed his gate that night, had envied ; to whom Jonathan had grudged his prosperity.

God's ways are more equal than we think them.



CHAPTER VI.

THROUGH FIELDS IN MAY.



MISS LYNN'S domestic difficulties did not end with the dismissal of Eliza Ann. Mrs. Lynn, grown wise and valiant by experience, would not hear of having another raw schoolgirl, and Daphne's means did not allow of a better class of servant : so they had to manage as best they could, with the occasional help of a charwoman.

Martha Male came in several times, but she was too loquacious and too strong for querulous, nervous Mrs. Lynn : and, more-

over, there was something like condescension in her tone and manner, not offensive by any means, but that told Daphne there was no occasion for *her* to go out, the wife of Abraham, and the mother of Andrew, for all that she had taken pity upon the forlorn schoolmaster in bygone days.

Jonathan had mentioned some one of the name of Jael. Daphne found out where Jael lived, and one warm May afternoon, a Saturday, while the elder girls were cleaning out the school, she put on her bonnet and set out across the fields to the Thornes' cottage.

Half-way up the village, she turned in at the gate of a field. It was pasture land, and the soft green turf was pleasant to her feet. Still more pleasant to her tired eyes was the tender yellow of the cowslips that carpeted the earth. She picked and picked as she went along, till her hands were full, each time thinking she had enough, and that this flower should be the last, and child-like each

time seeing a blossom too beautiful to be passed over. The field rose gently to a height where a circle of elms crowned it. They were dusted with their first light green, and the building rooks were cawing in the branches. Round their stems a month ago, the violets white and purple had covered the ground. Now, fleecy ewes were lying there with merry two-months lambs beside them, and a saucy jack-daw made his rounds from fleece to fleece.

The sounds and sights were so sweet and so soothing that Daphne walked slowly, and the sun was spreading his last faint flush over the cloudless heaven and over the tree-tops, as she reached the Thornes' house.

"Work? go out? it ain't much o' that I can do now-a-days," was Jael's blunt answer, when she had found out the schoolmistress's errand. But she looked up at the young fresh face framed by

the low doorway, and softened suddenly.

“Sit down, won’t you ? You’re young to be a school-missus, I take it, or else you carry your years very light. It’s a poor place this for genteel folks to come in.” And she brushed her apron over the chair she had placed for her visitor.

“Jonathan Cleare it was then as told you?” she went on interrogatively. “Well, he’d do a good turn for me, and I’d do anything for him as laid in my power, I would.”

“I should not like you to come if it put you out,” said Daphne.

“My dear,” said Jael—“I beg your pardon ; I didn’t ought to make so free, and you a stranger—it ain’t for the likes o’ me to think whether I’m put out, or whether I likes this or don’t like the t’other. It’s all as the Lord likes, and He knows the best, so folks says.”

Jael raised her hand and pointed to

the ladder. Daphne's eyes followed it to where the top (not a great way off) lost itself in darkness.

"There's one a-lyin' up there as I can't leave for no one. He ain't like to live long, and while he's here I mun bide with him."

"Is he very old?" asked Daphne, looking at Jael's haggard face, and at the hair streaked with grey that had escaped from her old black cap, and was resting on her shoulders.

"Fourscore and ten," said Jael. "Would you look at him? He'd take it very kind if you would."

Jael toiled up the ladder; Daphne followed her carefully, and found herself on a dark landing.

"Take care o' the hole," said Jael, "there's a board broke there."

"It is very dangerous," said Daphne, seeing that she could look straight down into the room below through the hole.

"Dangerous? Ay, very like it is. But there ain't no one to git hurt not now. Fader he'll never leave his bed no moor,—and my gal as used to be wi' me——" She broke off suddenly and turned into the little garret.

"Fader, here be a lady come to see ye."

"Not a lady, Master Thorne," said Daphne, coming forward, "only the school-mistress. I am very sorry to see you ill and in bed. The time must seem very long to you."

"Ay, times he do," said the old man, thickly. "Mostly of a mornin' when there's the work a-going for'ard—the horses to water and sich."

Daphne looked inquiringly at Jael.

"Don't take no notice," Jael whispered. "He thinks o' times he's wanted to work. He thinks he hears the master a-callin' of him, and that he can't goo. He worked well,

he did, in his day." And she raised her voice at the last sentence.

"Forty year along o' Mr. Falk," said the old man, his eyes brightening as he turned them on Daphne. "A good master he were, and we never had no words."

"You courted mother o' those days, didn't you, fader?" said Jael, drawing him out. She knew the things he loved best to remember.

"Ay, I courted her o' those days. Fine wench she were, and sarved along o' Master Falk. Still and quiet she were, and feared the Lord. Baked she did beautiful—didn't lay heavy on your stomach, it didn't—and milk, too, she could—there warn't never a cow as 'ud let fly at her."

"Has she been dead long?" asked Miss Lynn, turning to Jael.

"How long is it sin' mother died, fader?" said Jael, who knew the day and the year

by heart. He did not like any but himself to tell that tale.

“Thirty year come Midsummer: we hadn’t on’y her”—looking at Jael—“and my wife she were al’ays wonderful arter boys—and the Lord He guv’ her her wish—but He took her life from her. She died, and the boy—and I buried ’em together o’ a Sunday mornin’. And I came home—and the house were quiet like and still. And there were her sunbonnet a-hangin’ up agin’ the wall—and the worsted and the pins as women has, a-lyin’ in the basket in the window. And I prays to the Lord and I says, says I, ‘O Lord, as guv me my good partner, and as has took her clean away, keep her right agin I come and fetch her, and don’t be too hard upon Josiah Thorne.’”

He broke into tears, that Jael brushed from his face with her apron.

Daphne took the old Bible, and read to

the dying labourer that pastoral Psalm—
“The Lord is my shepherd.”

He wept again, but they were quieter and happier tears.

“He were al’ays for me. He never run foul o’ me. The Lord, He knows I done my best by Him, and He al’ays done His best by me.”

“You’ll come agin,” said Jael, as Daphne rose to go.

“Yes, I should like to come and see him again.”

“And I’ll look in every day for an hour and put things straight for ’e, if that’s any good,” said Jael.

“It would be a great deal of good,” said the schoolmistress, “if you could come while I am in the school and make things comfortable for my mother. I have a mother that is to me what your father is,” she added, smiling.

“I’ll come,” said Jael decisively. Daphne

read the stamp of poverty upon everything in the strange little dwelling. How good to be able to help these poor folk as she could now do.

What sort of charwoman would Jael make? That thought came second. But Jonathan Cleare had recommended her : and though the room below was in sad disorder, Daphne had noticed that the room above, where the bedridden father lay, was scrupulously clean.

Jael's own words explained the enigma. "Fader 'll never leave his bed no moor—and my gal as used to be wi' me——."

There was no place for honest pride in the little room below, where the foot of a visitor seldom entered, and where the aged master would never set his foot again.



CHAPTER VII.

AN ESCORT.



ARON FALK was under the elm trees as Daphne began to recross the field. He was bending over a sickly ewe, and discussing with a friend the state of the fleece, which he turned over with his cane.

He was a well-made, erect man, and his dark hair was brushed back smartly from his not unpleasing face. He looked a younger man than he was; time had not dealt unkindly with him. With many of the attractions of youth, he carried the stability of

later years. And to some women, even while they themselves are young: nay, perhaps, all the more *because* they are young, this is the greatest of attractions. It was not thrown away on Daphne Lynn.

And Mr. Falk's face, if somewhat stern in repose, was all the pleasanter for the change brought upon it by a glad surprise. His colour came, when, at the sound of her foot on the sward, and the ripple of her gown over the cowslips, he looked up, and found Miss Lynn a few yards from him.

The farmer was left to study his flock alone. The sickly ewe, with a feeble bleat, dragged herself on to her legs with a struggle, and ambled painfully away. Aaron Falk, with his hat raised, was saying "Good-evening" to the school-mistress.

"You've got an arm-full there," he said, smiling at her burden of cowslips; I hope you will let me carry them for you."

"Thank you very much," said Daphne,

who wanted to save her dress, and had no hands to pick it up with ; and she put the flowers into Mr. Falk's hands.

He carried them firmly grasped, and held out before him, as if he were quite unused, as indeed he was, to this sort of thing. Daphne gathered up her gown. !

"You've got it wet," he said, "the dew is falling. You must not get cold ; that would never do."

He blushed at finding himself speaking so familiarly to her. He felt he was talking with cool indifference when he meant to be respectfully diffident. It was the first time he had ever been conscious of real shyness, and the feeling was so strange that he hardly knew how he behaved under it.

"You would have less singing on Sunday," she answered, laughing.

"And that would be a loss," said the brewer, but almost under his breath.

They walked on in silence after that for

some little way. More and more dreamily came the cawing of the rooks as the elm trees on the hill were left behind them, and as the twilight, with its soothing stillness, crept over the land. The thrushes trilling and piping in the hawthorn hedge that bordered the road below them, and the sound of their feet treading rhythmically together alone broke the silence.

Daphne, rather at a loss for a subject of conversation with the rich brewer, said, after a while, "I have been up to that lonely cottage on the hill—at least, beyond the hill. Thorne, I think, is the name of the people ; an old man and his daughter. They seem to be very poor ; and the house is such a miserable place. Is that the Squire's property ?"

"Well, no—not exactly. It's a poor place, but they might make it better if they liked. He built it himself. He's a queer creature, and a worthless tenant."

Mr. Falk spoke hurriedly, and fidgeted with the cowslips, two or three of which fell to the ground.

"I thought him such a nice old man," said the schoolmistress, in a disappointed tone; "I am very sorry to hear he is not as respectable as he seems."

"Oh, there's nothing so much amiss," said the brewer; "he's like most of them. I'm carrying these badly, Miss Lynn." And he dropped a few more cowslips, which he stooped to pick up.

Daphne picked some up, too; but her thoughts were still with the Thornes in the lonely cottage.

"The woman—Jael I think they call her—is coming to do for my mother. She has a rough manner, but there is something I like about her."

Aaron Falk looked up, startled. "Indeed," he said drily, compressing his lips.

Jael going to work again, was she?

What might that mean? Would she be able to do now what she could not do of late—support *more* than the old bed-ridden father?

And, in any case, *she* was to be about the schoolmistress constantly; going out and in of the house; letting fall bits of gossip, tales of her own struggles, hints of who knew what?

The walk by Daphne's side had been so sweet a moment before. Watching her was a happiness now to Aaron Falk; talking to her alone was a great and rare happiness.

He was not a man who was sensitive to outward things, who had a keen eye and open ear to the sights and sounds of nature. But, unconscious of it as he might be, the rooks and thrushes, the pale green sky, the leaping lambs, the faint sweet smell of Daphne's cowslips, had conspired together to make that walk a time to be remembered.

It had been a great opportunity—when might he see her again alone? And yet he had let it slip; he had said nothing that could reveal to her the state of his feelings towards her. Let it slip? No, it had been filched from him by this ill news, this “little rift” that made “the music mute.”

Such a little rift! The news that Jael Thorne was going to work for the school-mistress.

They came to the dusty road, and turned up it.

“I need not take you out of your way, sir,” said Daphne.

“I hope I may ask you, as a favour, Miss Lynn, not to address me in that way.”

Daphne looked surprised, and laughed.

“I thought it was quite usual,” she said.

“From the people in the village, yes,” he said—then hesitating, “but not from—not from you; I should be glad if you could be

less formal—if I might venture to be on—on an easier footing with you, Miss Lynn. I cannot express what I want to say—what I should wish to say, but——”

“Thank you,” said Daphne, startled in her turn, more by the brewer’s agitated manner than by his words; “we are still hardly more than strangers, sir, though my mother and I are much indebted to you for many kindnesses.”

She stood still; she thought there was no occasion for Mr. Falk to escort her further.

“I must go home, now,” she said, and her manner had become a little cold and dignified. “I am much obliged to you, but I can take the flowers now.”

Andrew was lounging at the door of the forge, waiting for Jonathan to come and take a stroll with him.

“Look here, Jonathan,” he said, turning his shoulder and speaking over it, “there’s

Master Falk and her. He's making good running."

Jonathan, who was taking his coat off a peg on which some rusty horse-shoes were hanging, came forward and looked out.

Aaron Falk and Miss Lynn were standing together on the road ; she was taking the cowslips from his hands ; she was speaking, and the brewer was looking at her with a flushed, earnest face.

Jonathan turned upon his heel, and looked impatiently for his cap.

"Let's go out," he said, clapping it on his head, and shoving past Andrew, through the doorway.

"Good-evening," said Miss Lynn, to Jonathan, as she passed, turning her soft grey eyes on him, and then on Andrew.

Jonathan raised his cap, and made a sort of obeisance.

Daphne coloured. What did it mean ? Was he mocking her ?

Andrew noticed it too, and wondered.

“ Well, I never saw *you* put yourself out so before ; one 'ud think you'd been learnin' dancing. But she's like to be the brewer's lady, and so it ain't so much amiss.”

They did not walk long that night. Jonathan was out of sorts and “cross-grained,” as his friend called it.

He had not the satisfaction of knowing that all the evening Miss Lynn sat puzzling over his mock-reverence on the road.



CHAPTER VIII.

SILVER SPEECH.



ONATHAN had often heard Mr. May speak from the pulpit of the "sea of life." It seemed to him in these days that he understood for the first time the meaning of the well-worn simile.

No sooner had he left the trough of one wave than he was on the crest of another. A few weeks ago, to be at his ease with Andrew, to be sitting in the same pew in church, to see his honest face looking in at the forge door every evening, with

“There you are at it—ain’t you goin’ to give over? It’s gone six this twenty minutes”—a few weeks ago this state of things, then unattainable, had seemed to Jonathan to be all that he could wish for, all that was needed to make life flow on evenly once more.

But he and Andrew were more than reconciled, and yet peace had not come. A fresh trouble was on his spirit. He never spoke of it to any one. It was not Jonathan’s way to confide his troubles. It would have been almost as hard for him to tell them out to all the village gossips as to confide them to his mother and to ’Drew. Trust them he did, entirely : often he longed to pour out his soul as ’Drew could do so easily. But an unconquerable reserve forbade it.

Indeed he would hardly himself recognise the cause of his unrest. When the knowledge sprang up suddenly before him,

that, like other men, he had begun to love, and that his love was unreturned, nay, was never likely to be returned, he put the idea from him almost with scorn. And when the monotonous clinking of the hammer on the sounding iron did not serve to rock memory and thought to sleep, but only beat out a melancholy echo of his own feelings, he changed his mood to despondency.

Things had never gone right with him from first to last. His career had been checked ; his father's health was never likely to be better. God had never sent him any fierce trouble heretofore, but neither (so it seemed to him) would He send him any great good fortune. Some people in the world had all the prizes, and some had all the blanks : and Jonathan made up his mind to the twilight of a joyless life.

To his mother he was kinder and more tender than ever. And she noticed very

little change in him. He was not a gay lad at any time, always hard-working, and late of coming home. And then, in the evenings, he took to his books, or looked after his flowers in the window and the garden.

"I don't think as the warm weather suits Jonathan," she would say sometimes. "He don't seem as fierce as he do in the winter. His father there, he seem a little better when it gits warm."

"Well, we can't order our weather, can we?" said Martha Male. "The Lord knows a deal better than we do what we want. If we ordered the weather, we shouldn't have no weather at all. *You'd* want two sorts, let alone all the other folk."

As Jonathan went about among his flowers, he often saw Mr. Falk, spruce and erect, walking up the village street to the school-house.

Sometimes he would come back in a few minutes, and then Jonathan knew Miss Lynn must be out. He fancied the brewer at those times looked crest-fallen. At other times an hour or more passed before his step came down the road, and the cane swung regularly at intervals over the privet hedge. There was no dejection then in the brewer's gait. It seemed to Jonathan each time that his fate must have been decided, so elastic was his quick tread, his face set in such satisfied repose.

One evening, a soft June evening, the well-known step came by. Mr. Falk made a point of not looking at the Cleares' house as he passed. He looked straight ahead, and to-night he was whistling softly. There was no cane swinging over the hedge. He was looking down at something he carried carefully.

Jonathan rested on his spade, and followed him with his eyes. He had been

in the habit of working on, and not looking up, when the brewer passed: there was little they could have to say to each other now. To-night he did not feel inclined to shun him. He threw down his spade, and went to the gate from which he could see up the road. Mr. Falk had something large done up in a newspaper, which he held with both hands. He was crossing the road now to the school-house gate.

Jonathan hardly knew why he did it, but he opened the gate and let it slam noisily. Then he leant against it, with his arms folded. He wanted Aaron Falk to see that he was watching him.

The brewer turned round, and then continued his way to the school-house.

Jonathan walked down the road after him. Some perverse spirit had taken possession of him. He would be there to meet him when he came out.

To say—what? To say nothing : what was there to say? But he felt Aaron Falk's cup was too sweet, was overflowing, and he knew the very sight of him would be a drop of bitterness. Why was he to have all the smooth sailing and the green pastures, while other and better men smarted under the rod of an unjust fate?

He walked as far as the gate and looked down the playground to the school-house. There was the brewer in the doorway, and Miss Lynn herself was letting him in.

Jonathan turned on his heel. What a fool he had been. What was all this about, this rising in his throat, this heat in his face, this thumping of his heart? What could he do, if Miss Lynn chose to marry Aaron Falk?

His head went down a little. There was one thing he could do. One word, and Aaron Falk's chance would be destroyed.

Something green was trembling on the dusty road before him. It was a spray of maidenhair fern. He stooped and picked it up. Miss Lynn had had more flowers then, to-night: that was a nosegay that the brewer had carried so tenderly, wrapped in newspaper. Should he speak this one word? The one word that could ruin Aaron's hopes, and—set Miss Lynn free?

It was getting late—it was time to speak now, if the word was to be said, the word that would save her. And would it not be misery to a woman like Daphne Lynn to be married to Aaron Falk?

His colour came, and his heart beat faster as this thought came to him—that it would be a duty to her as a true and pure woman to tell her all. Perhaps, said Jonathan arguing to himself, his face turned still down to the dusty road—perhaps it would be a sin to keep silence!



CHAPTER IX.

GOLDEN SILENCE.

PERHAPS it was a sin to keep silence. Jonathan paced restlessly up and down the road after the village had betaken itself to sleep. One after another the lights were darkened in the windows, first in the lower windows, then in the upper. Only about the doors of the "Red Inn" a knot of men lingered and gossiped.

They were out of Jonathan's hearing, but had he been close by, he would not have been the wiser. He had no ears for any-

thing but his own thoughts ; and these seemed to him to be speaking aloud.

One word, and it was all over with Aaron Falk. Should he say the one word to-morrow, to Miss Lynn ?

He coloured, thinking of it. It would be a base thing to do behind a man's back, baser than ever after his promise of silence. And if the brewer could do base things, there was no need for Jonathan to follow him. He would be straightforward, whatever he did.

But he could say the word, and yet be true. He could meet Aaron Falk, and give him warning that very night, that to-morrow his secret should be a secret no longer.

Not for his own sake, said Jonathan, but for hers. For the sweetest woman—he paused in thought—was that the opening of a door, the click of a latch ? Was Aaron Falk coming ?

He could not hear for the beating of his heart. He walked rapidly up the street again. Now he heard voices distinctly in the stillness of the evening, voices in the school-house garden.

He went up to the large gate opening on the play-ground, and leant over it. The garden was beyond it; he could see figures moving. He stood there straining his eyes to watch them. Joniathan was a shy man; he had never leant on the school-gate like that before: he had never stared into another man's garden as he stared now into Daphne Lynn's. He had forgotten reserve and manners; everything was lost in a passionate jealous dread.

He could hear the sound of her dress against the laurels, he could hear her voice and the voice of Aaron Falk. He could just see the schoolmistress's figure moving to and fro, for the gown she wore was light, and showed against the creepers on the

house, and the shrubs in the garden. And now and then against the sky, where the shrubs were lower, he saw the outline of Aaron Falk's hat.

The church clock struck nine, and the throb in the bells after each stroke vibrated through the silent milk-warm air. A night-ingale in the copse was warbling out its heart to the scent of Daphne's roses. And yet all was trouble and weariness of spirit to the young man leaning on the gate.

Was there no way out of this—no way of dashing the cup of bliss from lips that so ill deserved it? Was there no way, said Jonathan, bending his face upon his arms, of doing what he wanted to do, without becoming less of a man and of a Christian?

Perhaps it was mean even to break the condition of his promise, mean to try and hold a man by his threat, as, a minute

ago, he would have liked to have held Aaron Falk.

But there was another way. Jonathan raised his head. Where had the thought sprung from? What was it that brought to his mind a promise, hitherto forgotten—but that might be claimed *now*?—

“If ever I can do anything for you in any way, let me know, Jonathan; *I’ll do it, whatever it is*—and there’s my hand upon it.”

Jonathan was staring on fixedly before him, but he saw nothing. He was hugging the remembrance of that promise to his sore heart.

He would wait there by the gate if another hour went by before the brewer left the company he liked so well. He would remind him of that promise, he would claim its fulfilment that very night.

“The one thing shall be this,” said Jonathan, shaping his speech as he waited on,

“I’ve kept silence for you, and I’ll keep it on *one* condition—that *you* keep your promise, Mr. Falk. And the one thing I ask, and that you’re bound in honour to grant, is this—that you give up your new hopes and your promised happiness, that you have done with courting a woman that’s as far above you—”

Jonathan started. A hand was laid on his shoulder. It was Mr. May.

“Good-evening, sir,” he said, taking off his hat and moving a few steps from the gate.

“You’re out late, Jonathan,” said the curate. “Are you enjoying the beautiful night?”

“Not exactly that, sir,” said Jonathan, with a clumsy attempt at a laugh.

“You and I are the only people about, I think,” said Mr. May. “All the village folk seem to be asleep.”

“Not quite all, sir,” said Jonathan,

bluntly, "though one would think it was time they were."

"The men at the inn-door I suppose you mean? They dispersed as I came by just now. He seems a steady fellow, that Jonas. I often come out in the evening to see there is no disturbance, and I don't often hear any noise. Why, Miss Lynn is about still, and her mother—there they are in the garden. And Falk—that's Falk, isn't it?"

The blind woman's quick ears caught the sound of voices at the gate. She came across the playground, feeling before her with her stick.

"Good-evening, sir. We have a beautiful evening, sir. We're picking roses, or looking at them, I don't know which."

"I never saw her so cheerful," said the curate to Jonathan, as he turned away from the gate. "Poor thing, she would be glad, I dare say, to see her daughter well married, but I don't know what we shall do

without her in the school. You'll have to be master, Jonathan ; you're the best educated man in the parish. Is your trade prospering ? Do you get much work ?"

Jonathan was obliged to follow Mr. May, who, while he spoke, walked slowly homewards.

"Not much, sir. Nothing prospers much with me."

"I know you have your hard times," said the curate, kindly, "but you have one blessing that's priceless. I don't say it because I'm a clergyman, but because my experience has taught it to me. The knowledge of having done right, of having sacrificed one's self for others — that's worth all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. God has blessed you with a sound body and a sound mind, and He has kept you straight heretofore : and the richest men can seldom say that. Keep true, and God will

help you. I have never known Him forsake His own."

Jonathan looked down again at the road. The minister little knew his thoughts, or he would not have spoken so to him. At other times, or from another man, Mr. May's speech might have seemed cant.

Now it seemed to Jonathan the one word he needed. He had never been ashamed of trying to do right. He had taken the way that seemed right as a lad, and he would stick to it.

He would not be mean after all, even to Aaron Falk. Revenge and threats were mean tools for men to ply.

He took off his hat and said "Good-night, sir," as he came to his own gate, and went indoors quietly.

But the curate did not know how his few kind words had soothed the young man's troubled spirit. He did not know that he had lifted a veil from Jonathan's

eyes, and showed him his thoughts and intentions in a new and startling light.

It was not for Daphne's sake that he had wanted to ruin Aaron Falk in her eyes. Self was at the bottom all through, and he had been deceiving himself.

It was not for him to avenge sin, or to hold the knowledge of it over a fellow-man. A greater had said, "I will repay."

And for Daphne Lynn, as far above him, Jonathan the blacksmith, as the stars above the elm-trees, he might trust God and the angels to see after her.

His love for her went out in a prayer that night that God would do what was best for her, and keep her from the evil.



CHAPTER X.

JUST WHEN THE RED JUNE ROSES BLOW.

“**W**E must have cared for flowers, at all events,” Daphne was saying, as Mrs. Lynn and Mr. Falk discussed the poor dead schoolmaster. “I never saw such quantities of roses, and such large blooms.”

She stooped over a large full-blown tea-rose, which she touched lovingly with her fingers.

“They are beautiful when they come to that size,” said Mr. Falk.

“I think the buds much prettier,” said

Miss Lynn ; "I am half sorry when they begin to open."

She passed from rose to rose, and the brewer followed her, picking his way gingerly among the little flower-beds. Once her dress caught on a thorn, and he disengaged it.

"Thank you," she said; but she gathered up her dress, and did not let it fall again. She was too simple, too little engrossed in self to see attentions where they were not meant, or to see them easily when they were. But there was something in Mr. Falk's manner that was unmistakable, and she was not inclined to encourage him at present, whatever might be her feelings hereafter.

For Daphne Lynn did not say to herself that nothing should ever induce her to marry Aaron Falk. He had been very good to her and to her mother, and she was not more indifferent than other women to

the advantages of what is called a "suitable" marriage.

But it must be suitable in a wider sense than the conventional one. She was formed in too sensitive a mould to face the idea of a loveless life. If her heart could go where money was, it might be well. It certainly would be well for her mother, whom she loved much better than herself. But she had no idea of marrying for the sake of a good home and an independence. So she did not compromise herself as yet in any way; and if she had been asked, this June evening, whether she meant to marry her rich suitor, she could not have answered.

Perhaps, like other women, she was too undecided on a point in which, it is often said, there should be no indecision. At all events Daphne Lynn was different to many women in this—she would not have blushingly denied that Aaron Falk cared for her. She knew no false modesty; and she

took the fact that he loved her just as a matter of plain fact. Women and men were loving each other every day, all the world over ; and if the brewer had been her first lover, which he certainly was not, she would have taken it as quietly as she took or rejected his attentions now.

At present she felt she was quite capable of being tired of the company of her faithful admirer. He came so often to the school-house, upon one pretext or another, and Mrs. Lynn encouraged his visits so much, that her daughter often wished that the brewery were not quite so close at hand.

Where were all her mother's good resolves gone to, about "keeping to themselves?" Only the winds knew. Mrs. Lynn had never been so happy, so little querulous, so hopeful as now. Daphne was not to slave all her life at teaching. Golden prospects were before her : and the cup of happiness was every day coming nearer to her

lips. She had never tolerated a lover before: it was a more than hopeful sign that she certainly tolerated Aaron Falk. What girl in her senses could refuse such a man, and such a home? Mrs. Lynn was going to say "match," but she thought "home" sounded a great deal better, and used it. We all speak two languages, and translate from one to the other rapidly, and with ease, as occasion requires.

"The roses are all named," said Daphne, lifting a label. "They are beautifully written—you could know it was done by a schoolmaster," she added, with a laugh.


She dropped the label. The ardent lover lifted it, of course, though it was too dark to see the name very distinctly. He recognized the hand, however: nearly all his own labels were written by Jonathan, in the days when he and the young blacksmith were on comfortable terms.

But he said nothing, when Miss Lynn

credited Mr. Byles with the copper-plate writing. Jonathan's name was not pleasant now to his ears, and did not come easily to his lips. Of late he had had reason to resent some small things he had seen ; an interview between Jonathan and Miss Lynn, in Mrs. Cleare's garden, when the schoolmistress had gone to visit Mrs. Cleare, and had accidentally found Jonathan at home : and a look or two he had seen cast by the young up-start at the harmonium on Sundays. Jonathan needed no trumpeter, he thought. He wanted keeping in his place.

Unwillingly the brewer had to retire at last, when Miss Lynn insisted that it was too late for her mother to be out any longer.

But as they went into the house, having parted with him, and Daphne closed and bolted the window in the parlour, the scent from his greenhouse flowers was almost as sweet as the June evening among the roses.



Daphne could not help putting her fresh face to them before she left the room.

Next day, between school-hours, Jael, stumping about in the parlour, and helping Daphne to clean the little table for dinner, said bluntly,

“Don’t grow in your garden, I take it. You’re wonderful lucky at getting flowers.”

“You don’t grudge them to me, do you, Jael?” said Daphne, noticing an irritation in her tone.

“Grudge ’em? I never grudged nobody nothing, let alone you. But the smell of them flowers don’t suit me.”

“Almost all flowers suit me,” said the schoolmistress, thinking Jael very hard to please.

“Ah, bless your heart—you’re like my gal. She were al’ays arter the primroses and vi’lets, and them in the copses. She don’t git no flowers now, I’m afeard.”

The tears had come into Jael’s eyes.

Daphne had never heard her speak unreservedly of this child before : Jael was reticent on every point, most of all on the subject of her own home and history.

But a friendship had sprung up between the mistress and the charwoman, and Jael was softening unconsciously under the gentle influence of Daphne Lynn.

Something in her manner, however, forbade inquiry about this child. Perhaps she was dead, thought Daphne, and said nothing. But one day, when she told Jael she wished that not for an hour or two but for all the day she could feel that she was looking after her mother, the answer came,

“Work *all* the day ? If I could do that my 'Scilla wouldn't be where she is now. I'd have her home and fend for her, if I had to die for it.”

Then Daphne ventured to ask where 'Scilla might be.

Jael, ironing at a table, pointed over her shoulder with her thumb and said,

“It’s the place as all the poor has before ’em when they’re old. But it ain’t many as has to go there before they’re eighteen years, as my gal’s done. But the Lord ’ll put it right some day. I think He’ll punish the one as brought her there before He’s done with it.”

“Does she come to see you ?” asked the schoolmistress, with interest.

Jael shook her head. At first she could not answer. After a while she said, with a sob in her voice that went to Daphne’s heart,

“She’s got that there as she loves better ’an me. She don’t think long for her mother, I reckon.”



CHAPTER XI.

A GALA DAY.

SULY came hot and fierce upon Shelbourne lying in its cradle between the squire's swelling, down-like fields, on which the elms stood, breathless and motionless, in a quivering veil of air, and against the most cloudless of July skies.

Dust on the roads, dust on the hedges, dust rising in clouds behind the carts that rolled lazily along from the Red Inn to the Brewery, and from the Brewery to Hepreth, while the carters waded in the

dust, with hot white boots, and the horses' sleek sides steamed as the evening came on, and the air grew cool enough to show it.

The birds had ceased singing ; the very weathercock, that emblem of change, stood motionless : the cows lazily chewed the cud, with hardly energy enough to sweep their tails round, to scare the black flies that gathered thickly on them. All nature lay in a deep sleep—the sleep of a flushed child in fever, too still and heavy to be a sleep of unmixed rest.

Only man toiled on, fighting against nature. Drays must still go to Hephreth ; carts must still supply the Red Inn : the hay-time had been, and was long since over : harvest was at the door : there is no holiday-making for the English labourer, or the English brewer or farmer, who, though their summer is so short when compared with southern summers, cannot afford to sit down under their vine, or to lounge in the sun on hot

door-steps, as the darker races can. They have little sympathy for the sun, these colder-blooded English people. They will stand frost and snow well enough, and take rainy days as a matter of course ; but they chafe under the sweltering heat of July days ; and no wonder, for " men must work " in England, however hotly the sun may shine.

Strange to say, the Shelbourne children braved the heat better than their fathers, and skipping-ropes were still to the fore, and games of hopping and racing went on in the playground, under the mid-day blaze of the sun.

But inside the school they began to feel the heat. Faces that had been bright and wide awake over the skipping or the hopping, became dismally sleepy over the spelling-book and before the black board. The little ones nodded in their corner : a fat little figure, with dimpled legs and arms,

might here and there be seen at full length upon a bench, the curly head turned upon the rosy arms, and a rosier pair of lips pouting in sleep over the half-closed fingers. And Miss Lynn had winked at the breach of discipline, and let them sleep on.

Now July had come, and holidays came with it ; six weeks of silence in the playground, and of peace for Miss Lynn.

Daphne closed the books for the last time thankfully. She was fond of her work and of her children ; but she was also fond of quiet. She longed to be free to walk in the copses in the evening, and to keep in the house with drawn blinds during the hot day ; to do what she liked—most of all to have some time to think.

Through the summer the brewer's attentions had not slackened. Rather they increased, and as the sun got into mid-heaven so Aaron Falk's love for Daphne Lynn rose to its full strength.

He was restless, miserable, confident, wavering in turn. Despairing he was never. He had no cause to despair. Everything was in his favour; position, money, his home, his appearance and manner—he knew all these counted with women. If Daphne Lynn married him, she would be making as good a marriage as it was possible for her to make.

Yet—he had no cause to be certain of success. Daphne was always frank and open with him, civil, perhaps almost cordial, but nothing more. He longed sometimes to see her look restrained and shy in his presence, to see her feel as he felt, when they were together. He longed to hear her voice falter when she thanked him for his flowers, to see the colour come to her face when he appeared, or leave it when he left her.

He could not deceive himself into thinking this had ever been the case. He could not feel he was part of the schoolmistress's

life, as she had become part of his ; it seemed to him that in the years that border upon middle age the fervour and the suffering of a boyish passion had overtaken him.

And he felt that if this love should be unreturned, the wound would not heal with him as it heals with the stripling. He would not look back from maturer years and say of it "that folly," as younger men and women can. His life was to be blessed, or not blessed ; he was to be happy, or not happy. It was to be Daphne Lynn's sweet face in his cheerless home, or nothing. No other woman had won his esteem and love before ; no other woman could win it again. He had never wished to marry, he had never thought of marrying, until her face had come across him. His money, his beer, his public-houses, and the distant respect of inferior men, had hitherto sufficed him. Now he felt all those were only of value to

him, in so far as they helped him towards winning Daphne Lynn.

I think there was a meaning and a depth in this love of the calculating, civil, cold-hearted brewer that he did not in the least understand himself. We none of us understand it when the glamour is on us, and the object of our love stands before us, filling up the foreground and leaving no landscape to be seen beyond.

But I think, though he would have denied it, that it was not only Daphne Lynn, a woman, that Aaron loved. He had, as baser men than he have, a yearning after the good, and the true, and the beautiful. He knew his life had been an unhallowed life; he wanted to hallow it now. He had not the strength of purpose, the love of righteousness, to lead him to the higher paths, and to keep him there. But he knew goodness and truth when they came near; he longed for them when they were

beyond his reach. Perhaps it is hard on Aaron Falk, but the thought suggests itself—were they not the possessed of devils who gave the loudest witness to Christ's purity and power? Peter and John knew Him as their Master, not as the Son of God; the darkness of fierce evil first recognised the contrast of His spotless purity.

But the possessed entreated Purity to withdraw from them. Poor Aaron Falk wanted to have his incarnation of goodness for his own.

At the height of his fever of hope and suspense, came the school holidays, and the School Feast. It was always a great day in Shelbourne, and mothers and sisters shared in the fun, sitting round under the limes in the field at the Place, drinking Mr. May's tea, and eating his bread and butter with a good heart.

Mr. Falk never failed to attend the School Feast, as the noise waxed merry, and the

afternoon wore on. He would have come in the morning, too, if he could have been with Daphne, while she arranged the cups and saucers ; but he had passed the stage when to meet her in a crowd could be a pleasure ; he wanted to say one thing to her now, to ask one question. He felt the chatter of children, the mild babble of Mrs. Myse, the officious interference of the farmers' daughters, who always came to help, would be intolerable. He would go later, when the children were playing, and he might find Miss Lynn alone.

He had piles of accounts to go through that morning. But as he ran his finger down them, again and again the total slipped from him. He was away in the field and he could see her. Would she be under the limes when he got there ? Would Mrs. May leave her, and would Daphne leave the children, and walk round the shrubbery with him ?

His hand trembled as he started once more down the unhappy column, and jotted down the total hastily, in case it should escape him again.

In the field long tables were being arranged. A pile of snowy cloths were making their way over the grass towards them, in Jael's arms. Mrs. Myse in a large black hat, and Miss Lynn in a white one, with a blue ribbon round it, were standing at one end of the first division of the table.

Mrs. Myse was testing the steadiness of the tressles.

"I think it is all right," said Miss Lynn :
"there is another coming."

"It is sure to be all right if Jonathan sees to it," said Mrs. Myse. "There is something so *reliable* in Jonathan. I never feel anxious when he is to be had."

It was Jonathan who was carrying the boards for the remainder of the table. Behind him came Ben Brewer, whom Mr.

Falk had spared for the occasion, bringing the remaining tressles.

Jonathan had the boards over his shoulder, and his head was bent as he came along.

“Jonathan, my dear lad, don’t strain yourself,” said Mrs. Myse, anxiously. “What a load for one man!”

He put down the boards, and they fell together on the grass with a clank. He tossed his hair off his forehead, and passed his handkerchief across it. It was not till then that he saw Miss Lynn.

“Good morning, Mr. Cleare,” said Daphne, softly. He thought there was a sound of reproach in her tone. He had quite forgotten the bow he had made her in a jealous impulse long ago. Daphne had forgotten it too, till now.

Jonathan raised his cap. Many people raised their caps to Daphne Lynn. She looked “such a lady,” as the Shelbourne

people said. Mrs. Bellar said she was "stuck up;" but only Mrs. Bellar, who had never forgiven the dismissal of Eliza Ann.

Mrs. Myse went away to give some directions in the house. Daphne began unpacking a clothes-basket, full of cups and saucers.

"You get the forms," said Jonathan to Ben Brewer. "Can I help you?" he said to Daphne, who was by this time on her knees in the grass, laying ranks of mugs, all fitted into each other, beside her.



CHAPTER XII.

TOWARDS EVENING.

JONATHAN spoke very little to Miss Lynn. He watched her going up and down, setting the cups upon the tables, or spreading the large white cloths with her small hands. He watched the lights and shadows on her face under the shade-hat ; the small determined mouth, the quick gentle ways, that many others than Jonathan, if they could have had the chance, would have watched too. Now and then she raised her earnest grey eyes to his face, when she asked him a

question ; and Jonathan looked at them a moment, and thought they were like no eyes he had ever seen before ; and then looked away quickly at the may-trees or at the limes. They were not for him, those eyes : what use to look at them ?

He had learnt to give up what he cared for most : he could do it again, since he must do it. The first sacrifice had involved another ; for if he had been away now, and a prosperous mechanic, this face would never have troubled him. And it was the one face he knew that could. Rosy, comely, country maidens had never touched Jonathan's heart, and made it ache. It was the still, pale face, which bewitched Aaron Falk, that had conquered him at last.

And yet he could say nothing to her ; he could only hold his peace. What would his fourteen to nineteen shillings a-week (and how hardly earned they were), and his humble trade, look in *her* eyes ? She had

seen his home, two-roomed, and tiny ; she knew him best in his work-day clothes, hammering in the dark forge, a common blacksmith.

And she was better born he knew. Her father had been a small farmer. Perhaps the grandfathers of both were on the same footing ; but a step once made among the humbler classes is not easily forgotten, or given up. Once a farmer's daughter, always a farmer's daughter. The son of a labourer could be no match for her.

He should never tell, he knew, how strangely her presence stirred him. He was a man of few words ; and where his feelings were concerned, Jonathan became a sealed book. And, as for speaking now, what was there to say ? He did not hope to have the schoolmistress for his wife ; at least, he said he did not. He only wanted to see her, to watch her, to have a look sometimes into the depth of those grey eyes.

She was going to be the brewer's wife, all the people said. Should he care to look into her eyes then? Could he do it then? Jonathan started when that thought came to him, and said he had no hope. She was going to have a good home, and he hoped she would be happy. He could not help feeling that she must be happy anywhere, because anywhere she would be loved.

Presently the children came defiling through the field. Mr. May said grace. Miss Lynn marshalled them quietly into their places. It was wonderful how she managed them, without any loud orders or bustle. She lifted her hand, or let it fall, and all the hundred and ten bright little eyes hung upon it, and understood the sign.

Jael was plodding backwards and forwards with hot tea in cans. Ben Brewer presided over the milk. The bread and butter had been cut and stacked at the

Place by the farmers' daughters and Mrs. Myse.

There was a great silence among the children, deep in hot tea, and with their mouths full. Only the replenishing of cups and mugs went on ; and hands shining with soap were stretched out for more and for more.

The sun beat down fiercely, but the tables were under the lime-trees, and balmy breaths of air stole in now and then, and stirred the children's hair, and made ripples in the tea. The sunbeams danced out and in over the white cloth, and over the parterre of gay Sunday hats and cloaks. And, as hunger was satisfied, voices began to rise in a happy half-whispered babble.

"You may talk as much as you like, my dears," said Mrs. Myse, rubbing her hands, and smiling. "We wish you to be happy, as well as good to-day."

This had the effect of producing a deep

and profound silence. No one had anything to say.

“ I think they have done, ma’am,” said Miss Lynn. “ Would you be so kind, sir, as to say grace ?”

She turned to Mr. May, who had moved away a few steps. He had gone forward to meet Aaron Falk.

The brewer had his hand in the curate’s; but every one saw his eyes had gone beyond him, to where Daphne Lynn stood.

He forgot the hundred and ten bright little eyes, Miss Sophy’s and Miss Maria’s keen interest in his affairs, Mrs. Myse’s gentle knowing peeps from under the thin black fringe of her parasol. He was at Daphne’s side, and holding her hand.

Every one saw that his colour changed ; that from the moment his eyes had rested on her he had not been the composed self-possessed Aaron Falk they all knew so well. Daphne, who was not agitated as

he was, felt that every one had seen it, and a shade of pink came into her face. The brewer's heart leapt for joy when he saw it. It was the first time she had shown any embarrassment in his presence. He hailed the token as full of hope.

Mr. May said grace. The children, led by Miss Lynn, chanted the Amen. Then she said, "You may go now;" and the forms were pushed back, and they tumbled over each other into the grass, picked themselves up and ran on with wild shouts of glee, dispersing themselves over the field.

Meantime Jonathan had been putting up swings in the field, swings of all heights for children of all sizes.

He always put his heart in his work, as Mr. Falk used to say, in the days when Jonathan pleased him, when Mr. Falk's books and maps were all at the disposal of the young blacksmith. He did not look round, though Miss Lynn was at the tea-

table, till his job was over. Then he came leisurely back across the grass with a twist of rope in his hand.

The children rushed past him. The table was empty, except at one end where a knot of people (not children) were standing.

Mr. May and Mrs. Myse were there; Miss Sophy and Miss Maria, farmer Bates' daughters, and two or three other assistants were there. Daphne Lynn was there, and a child was clinging to her skirt; and close behind her, trying, as Jonathan thought, to put himself between her and the rest of the group, stood Aaron Falk.

Jonathan came up to Mrs. Myse, and touched his hat.

"Shall you want me any more, ma'am?" he asked.

"Not to help, thank you, Jonathan, but we shall want you to have tea, after all your kind exertions."

"No, thank you, ma'am," he began ; but Mrs. Myse, turning to Daphne, said—

"Miss Lynn, would you kindly make Jonathan a cup of tea?"

Daphne went to the table at once ; the child still clung to her skirt, and followed her.

"I am afraid it is cold, Mr. Cleare," she said ; "you must be very tired ; won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you," he answered ; but he came and stood near her, only a few feet from her.

He did not want the tea ; he would have liked a glass of beer much better ; but he wanted this from Daphne's hand. A savage pleasure seized him when he saw the brewer standing disconsolate, under the limes, obliged now to devote himself to Mrs. Myse.

It might be the last time he should ever speak to her ; something in Mr. Falk's

manner made him think the crisis could not be far off. To-day it might be settled, and then he could never look into those grey eyes again.

He was looking into them, standing near her, strangely miserable and strangely happy, when a sharp cry close beside them caused every one to look round.

Ben Brewer and Jael had been clearing the table; they were putting the mugs one into the other, and laying them in the basket.

And the cry came from Jael's lips.

Daphne ran to her.

"What is it, Jael? What is it?" she said, kneeling down on the grass beside her, for the poor woman had sunk down upon it, and was as pale as marble.

Jael made no answer; there was a gurgling sound only in her throat; she was either fighting for breath, or trying to speak.

"Has she been ill?" they asked of Ben; "did you notice anything before?"

"She been a-holding her heart this few minutes, but she often do that; I didn't take no count of it; she mostly holds that when she's tired; she looked up queer at some of you there, sir, and then she cried out; but she'd been breathing hard a few minutes, like she was out o' breath."

"Poor Jael, my poor Jael," said Daphne to herself, reproachfully; "I've not been thinking of you at all; I know she gets easily tired; she often holds her heart and complains of a pain there," she added, turning to Mr. May and Mrs. Myse, who were standing over her.

Daphne had unloosed Jael's gown at the throat, and was chafing her cold hands.

"She ought to have brandy," said Mr. Falk, obliged to come up and show some concern. Then he retreated again, and

walked about the field, examining the swings.

Mr. May followed him, after Mrs. Myse, with a flushed face, had consulted with him in a whisper.

“Falk, I am afraid we have no brandy ; you know we can’t afford such things ; may they send for some to your house ?”

“Send ! Oh yes, of course,” was the answer ; “send Ben.”

The next thing that Aaron Falk saw, was Jael Thorne being led across the field, and out into the road, by Jonathan, whose arm was supporting her ; and on the other side was the schoolmistress, on whose shoulder Jael’s hand rested.

Should he send a cart for her ? The thought came to him, and then stuck in his throat.

But as he saw her feeble uncertain steps, and knew that Daphne Lynn was going to be taken from him, that he might not

he had again that day, he changed his
mind.

But he was not if the light cart can
be used, I shall take them. And if
not, I shall take the grey mare and
the dog.

He was not sure.

He was not sure, sir. She's
very much afraid.

He was not sure.

He was not sure. Mrs. Wyse, calling
him, "may I
I do think
it would be
dear little
thing."

He was not sure. "The woman has gone,"
he said.

He was not sure. "I shall be back for supper.
I shall be back to come.
I shall be back; and there
I shall have made a cake."

Alfred May thought it was seldom he could give his aunt a pleasure. And, if the truth be told, he was as anxious as she was that Miss Lynn should marry his good friend, Mr. Falk. So he nodded his assent.

Aaron Falk was not engaged ; he would be most happy to come.

He went about amongst the children all the remainder of the afternoon, playing with them, even swinging them. He talked to the women who sat in groups upon the grass with their babies ; he held the transparently thin parasol over Mrs. Myse's head while she did the same.

These things were not after his own heart. But the afternoon was passing ; the shadows were getting long. Soon the screaming and the swinging would cease, and he should see Miss Lynn again.

But why had that fool Jonathan gone with her ?

And why had Jael fainted ?

He put the last question from him without answer. He had nothing to do with the poor charwoman or her state of health.



CHAPTER XIII.

“PIMPERNELS DOZING.”

“**IF** WISH as you’d go back, missus,” said Jael, as they passed the brewery and the church, and took the turn to the field, the shortest way to Josiah’s cottage.

“I can’t go back till I see you better,” said the schoolmistress. “Are we going too fast, Jael?”

Jonathan slackened his pace. Jael was leaning heavily on his arm, and her steps were still uncertain, but the livid bluish colour had left her face.

"What did you feel?" asked Daphne, with concern. She had never thought to see Jael walk home again.

"Feel?" she repeated, feebly, "I don't know as how I felt. But I'd been feelin' sadly through the carryin' and that, and the heat: and I knew as a straw 'ud upset me. And, somehow, I looked up, and seed him—and—"

Jael stopped short. The perspiration came out on her forehead. She felt she had made a false step, for Jonathan's hand had touched her arm suddenly, and she knew it was to silence her. She had forgotten that she was not alone with Jonathan; her head was still giddy and bewildered.

"Saw *whom*?" said Miss Lynn, with a strange anxiety in her voice, looking first at Jael and then at Jonathan for an answer.

Jonathan was looking straight ahead. His face had a new expression on it—tha

Miss Lynn could see. She could not interpret the look, but the meaning of it was the thought chasing through his brain—why had he been a fool, and silenced Jael? *He* could never be a traitor and break his promise, even to Aaron Falk; but he might have let another do it, and been blameless; the cup, so close to the brewer's lips, might have been snatched away at that moment, but for his foolish impulse. Another instant, and Jael would have betrayed at least that, in some way, Aaron Falk had wronged her, that the sight of him had "upset" her, as she said. Even at that moment, Jonathan knew that the first impulse had been the right one: But, O God, he said to himself, how hard the right way seemed! Was there no time when a little evil might bring about a great good? And this time he was tempted to no evil, to no slandering of another man for his own selfish purposes,

to no movement of dastard jealousy. To keep silence, and let Jael speak, was all that he needed to have done. It seemed to him that that one quiet movement of his hand was all that stood between himself and Daphne Lynn, and he himself had upheld the barrier that divided them.

A moment after, he remembered all the other barriers that Jael's words could never have removed. He remembered that if Miss Lynn refused Aaron Falk to-day, it would not make him, Jonathan, a fit match for her. His eyes fell. He turned them on Daphne with a look of penitence, as if he had been doing her an injury. Ah, if she could know the devil that possessed him sometimes, she would not be walking with him now.

"It has been very hot," said Miss Lynn; "you ought not to have worked as you did." But they both knew by her tone

that she was quite aware her question had been unanswered.

They went slowly on in silence. The cool grass was pleasant to their tired feet ; the sound of Daphne's dress upon the daisies made a soft rippling accompaniment to their troubled thoughts.

So soft, that at last the trouble melted away, and only the rippling went on, soothing them all, and making the sweet evening sweeter.

The sun was only halfway down the heavens ; it was still too warm for walking fast, even if Jael's strength had been equal to it.

" I'm keepin' you long," said Jael, her hand still on Daphne's shoulder. " I can walk now, Jonathan, lad, without your arm, on'y keep a-nigh me a while longer."

" We are not in any hurry," said Daphne, " we like going slowly ; at least," she added, hastily, " I can answer for myself. It is

heaven to be walking through the fields on such an evening. But—do you want to go back?" she asked, turning to Jonathan.

He coloured.

"I'd a deal rather go on," he answered.

"There ain't no flowers now," said Jael; to Daphne: "you miss the flowers, I count."

"Yes; I miss the flowers in the fields and woods: they are more beautiful than any garden-flowers. But there are a few still; there are some pimpernels going to sleep."

She did not stoop to pick them, for Jael would have lost the support of her shoulder. Jonathan fell behind.

"Well, I'd never say that, if I'd got roses like yourn," said Jael. "Jonathan, lad, the missus here says she favours the field flowers the best. She don't make no count o' your roses."

Jonathan had come to Daphne's side.

He had a little bunch of half-closed pim-pernels in his hand. He was holding them tenderly, but not offering them to Miss Lynn.

"How pretty!" said she; "so small and yet so beautifully made."

"He made a good job o' it, did the Lord," said Jael. "He didn't scamp His work, not with the lessest of 'em."

"Have you got fine roses?" asked Daphne, turning to Jonathan, who still held the pimpernels in his hand.

"It's the roses as grows in *your* garden, I mean," said Jael, standing still a moment to rest. "He planted 'em all for Muster Byles," and she pointed to Jonathan.

"Did you?" said Miss Lynn, with pleased surprise. "I have always wondered how a man who had such bad health could have managed them so well. We have had such roses this year, Mr. Cleare. I don't think you have ever seen them."

"Are there any left?" said Jonathan, looking wistfully into her face. Perhaps she might ask him to come and see them.

"A few," said Daphne. "Will you come and see them? We should be so glad if you would come and look at them at any time, whether I am at home or not."

His face fell. "Whether she was at home or not." A cold invitation. Yet what had he hoped for?

Daphne saw the change. She wondered how she had pained him. She watched him as they turned down the lane. What Mrs. Myse had said was very true. There was something very "reliable" about Jonathan. And it seemed to her there was something more in him than that. There was that indescribable we-know-not-what that makes us feel a subtle sense of sympathy for some who come across our paths.

He had known trouble; that Daphne Lynn could see: though she did not guess

that even now he was troubled, that now he was fighting a harder fight than when he gave up his career and his ambition five years ago.

She only knew of the one struggle, and she thought as she looked at him that she should like him to be her friend. She felt he had picked the flowers for her. She held out her hand as they reached Josiah Thorne's cottage and said,

"Will you give me those pimpernels?"

He looked up with a quick keen glance. Was she mocking him and his half-shut flowers?

But there was no mockery in her face. And silently he gave her the flowers.

A little, a very little of their bright colour passed out of the land of dreams where they had gone, into Daphne's quiet face.



CHAPTER XIV.

A CRISIS.



ONATHAN stayed to help Jael up the ladder. Then he bid them good evening and went home.

He could not trust himself to walk home with Miss Lynn, even if she had allowed it, which he thought very doubtful.

He went back thinking how near to her he had been at every step of that sweet evening walk. He kept as close to the very path they had taken as was possible across the trackless field. Sometimes he fancied he

could see their trace upon the grass, a whiter shade of green where her dress had passed over the meadow ; the spot where he had stopped to pick the pimpernels—the pimpernels that she had taken.

His heart gave a leap, tumultuous rather than happy, thinking that she had asked him for them, that even now they were hers, and in her keeping.

'Drew was in the village street talking with some other men just home from work, when Jonathan came up.

"Had your supper?" asked Andrew.

"No ; I don't want supper. I'm going up to shut the forge and see after the fire. Come up, won't you?"

Andrew followed him with his hands in his pockets.

The cool of the evening had hardly set in yet. It was still close and warm, though the sun had gone down and the dust kept rising under the feet of workmen going home.

The two friends sat down on the bench outside the forge, and smoked the pipe of peace together. An hour went very quickly, and the soft grey twilight of a summer evening, that is neither light nor darkness, but a tryst between the two, crept silently over the village. The happy tired-out children were all asleep, though on other summer nights the mothers, who were not averse to knitting in the gardens or on the road themselves, let them roll on the grass or in the dust, as they liked, till the low crowded rooms were cooled by evening breezes, and sleep was possible. But to-day, all through the heat of the afternoon, they had romped, and see-sawed, and swung, till in sheer exhaustion they had flung themselves down under the lime trees, and had shaded their eyes even then from the glints of sun that shot down through peep-holes in the dense foliage. If Miss Lynn had been there they would have asked for

stories, and would not, they all knew, have been refused. But Miss Lynn had gone away with Jael Thorne. So they lay upon their backs and made themselves happy as only children can, while Mr. May and Mrs. Myse and their elders sauntered through the field or rested on the benches at the tea-table.

“After tea,” said Mrs. Myse, trying to look unconscious, “we will all go into the shrubbery. It is so sweet there on an evening like this.”

Miss Sophy and Miss Maria Bates and the other farmers' daughters who had not been asked to supper, had taken themselves away. Mrs. Myse, with unusual caution and diplomacy, had not allowed it to transpire that Miss Lynn and Mr. Falk were to remain. Miss Sophy and Miss Maria had ceased to hope for the honour of any attention from the rich brewer. Jealousy had never fanned the flame of their warm interest in him ;

for he had never favoured other maidens with his smiles. To-day they had exchanged glances, seeing his unusual manner with the schoolmistress. But it was not likely *that* meant anything ; Mr. Falk was not the person to make so bad a match as *that*. The farmers' daughters, who spelt indifferently and dressed worse, looked with condescension only upon Daphne Lynn, who had to earn her bread, and teach naughty village children all day long. No wonder she always dressed so quietly ; what else could she afford ? And Miss Sophy adjusted the pink rose nodding at the side of her hat as if in approval of her kindly reflections, and tossed back the shining brown curl that strayed upon her shoulder.

Mr. Falk was "not a marrying man" said Miss Sophy and Miss Maria, and so comforted themselves.

"Come down and see the swans," said Andrew, when he had knocked the ashes

out of his pipe. "It's too hot for supper or sleeping. Let's take a turn. I'm cramped with sitting here."

They went down to the gate of the approach to the Place, and opening it, leant over the parapet of the bridge to watch the swans. Andrew had brought some bread to throw to them.

The hen had gone to her nest with her downy little ones. They could see her, a white spot among the osiers on the other side. The other swan was on the water, his long neck turned under his wing. It seemed as if he, like other people in Shelbourne, was loath to go to bed on such a night as this. He woke up and came proudly rowing himself to the bridge, when Andrew called, and the bread made circles on the still water.

While they stood there they heard voices in the shrubbery walks. It must be Mr. May and Mrs. Myse out walking. Jonathan

and Andrew felt no shyness at being within the grounds ; all the people were allowed now to walk there. Indeed, the fences and palings were so broken down and useless that to forbid it would have been folly. Who could prevent the children from coming in to pick the wild flowers that grew there so plentifully ? And if the children came, why not others ? Mr. May liked to see his people about. It flattered him, poor man, that he should have anything they cared to share with him. He liked them to share his pleasures, and if the moss-grown walks and tangled shrubberies pleased them, it pleased him too to see them there.

When the voices had died away, Jonathan and Andrew walked on. They were both thinking of the night when last they had been here together, coming so troubled and leaving so comforted.

“ I ain’t nearer the truth now than I was then,” said Andrew to his friend. “ And

yet I know I'm not down-hearted like I was. It's all along of being sure of you, Jonathan—of being able to speak out my mind."

"You haven't been to see 'Scilla, have you?" asked Jonathan, as they walked on and turned into the winding paths.

Andrew shook his head for answer.

"I'm glad you haven't; it would be of no use," said Jonathan. "I'm glad you haven't been."

"I know she's happy enough," said Andrew, pulling the petals out of an ox-eye daisy he had picked, and looking down. "I ast Jael after her, and she al'ays tells me she hears as she don't make no trouble at all. That keeps me quiet, it does, and I don't think I could bear to go and see her, if I speak the truth. You don't think there's anything I could do for her, do you?"

Jonathan did not answer. Andrew looked

up and heard footsteps on the walk. They could see no one yet, but they could hear voices coming nearer.

“It’s more than I hoped for,” a man’s voice was saying ; “it makes my life look different even——”

The speaker stopped suddenly. Aaron Falk and Miss Lynn were face to face with Jonathan and Andrew.

Daphne had had hers turned away when first Jonathan saw them. She was looking into the shrubs as if to avoid Aaron Falk’s gaze. And he was gazing at her, his hand was stretched out as if begging for her hand ; and she was wavering only, uncertain, not indignant.

As they came upon Jonathan and Andrew she had coloured deeply, as deeply as was possible for that pale face.

Aaron Falk had coloured too ; but his blush changed to an angry annoyance when he recognised the two young men who had

Thus interrupted him, who must have overheard his passionate avowal to Daphne Lynn.

Andrew said "Good-night, sir," and stepped into the grass to let them pass. Jonathan stood still in the path a moment, and looked the brewer full in the face.

"Let this lady pass," said Aaron Falk, angrily; "have you forgotten your manners, Cleare?"

Jonathan mechanically moved off the path. He noticed no anger in the brewer's tone. His own thoughts were enough for him just then.

Miss Lynn looked up, and their eyes met. She looked at him, and it was more than a passing glance. Jonathan felt that; but the meaning of the look, how could he interpret it? Eyes like Daphne Lynn's are so often full of a strange, wistful earnestness, when a hard heart is hidden beneath their veil.

They passed by, and Jonathan stood still on the spot where he had met her. It was all over now. The crisis had come ; and Miss Lynn had the prosperous man, with his money, his lovely house, his education, his manners, his love, at her feet.

And she had *looked away* only, when he besieged her ear. "If she had not cared for him," said Jonathan, "she would not have been there with him alone." His "life seemed different," the brewer had said.

Well might it seem different!

Two hours ago Jonathan's life seemed different. The sun was up then, and they were walking together, he and she, through the summer fields.

Now the sun had set. A walk in the shrubbery, a meeting in the path, a few words overheard — and the illusion was dispelled.

It could not be a bitter blow, said he to himself, for he had never known hope.

But, ah ! if it might have been someone else that Miss Lynn had blessed—anyone but this man, Aaron Falk !

Mr. May, Mrs. Myse, and Mrs. Lynn passed him by, not fifty yards behind the happy lovers.

“We shall all like it,” Mr. May was saying to Mrs. Lynn ; “it is what my aunt has long hoped for.”



CHAPTER XV.

ANDREW'S DREAM.

IT seemed to Jonathan that a year passed over him in the half-hour that it took him and Andrew to reach home.

He was vexed with himself; it seemed to him he had fallen in his own esteem. For, all through, he had told himself that his feeling for Miss Lynn was—well, he could not say what it was, the experience being so new to him—but there had been no hope, he said, mixed with his jealous concern for her welfare.

Now he knew, by the dull pain at his heart, by the sudden deadness of the evening sky and of the landscape that he had before felt to be beautiful and soothing, that hope had been with him, and had now taken flight. It is a thankless task to try and paint a sorrow like this. In later life we wonder at the pain it was possible in youth to suffer ; or we forget that such suffering ever was for us, and smile over the foolish, imaginary griefs of a younger generation, with the complacency of a longer experience and a superior wisdom.

But the pain is none the less hard to bear, because half its sting is added by the growing-pains of youth. And it is enough to say that Jonathan suffered as the young only suffer.

All the more he suffered, because no one had yet found the key to the locked chamber where he hid away all that seemed to him too sacred for telling. Not that he would

put it in that way ; for he was little given to naming or analysing, and only knew that it could not be with him as it was with Andrew, who poured out his heart freely so soon as it was burdened. The more a thing weighed upon Jonathan's mind, the more he kept silence.

It was the worse for him in more ways than one, for he had many a stab from his friend's lips that he might have been spared, if he had been less reticent, and Andrew more discerning.

But the time had come for even Andrew's eyes to be opened. He had been too long a scholar in the school of affliction not to see that his friend was another man, after the encounter in the shrubbery walk.

And now it was his turn to keep silence. He felt he could not touch upon Jonathan's trouble unsolicited. Plain Andrew was conscious that his friend's reserve set its

seal upon his lips also. A man of keener intellect and coarser mind would have felt no scruple in telling Jonathan that he had discovered his secret. Andrew was the reverse of this; if his intelligence had not helped him to guess the truth before, his feelings prevented his intruding the knowledge of it upon Jonathan now.

But the careless allusions to Miss Lynn and Aaron Falk ceased. The schoolmistress became a sealed subject between the two friends. And Andrew came oftener than ever to the forge, and took his mate out with him to have a walk, or to smoke on the bench outside the house.

Sometimes, if Jonathan were out later than usual, after some job in the village, he would find 'Drew sitting on his bench, waiting for him. Jonathan would have brought a book, and read while he waited: Andrew never read, except out of his prayer-book on Sundays. He sat cross-legged, holding

his knee, or whittled a stick with his pocket-knife.

One sultry August evening, ten days after the walk which had decided Jonathan's fate, 'Drew sat longer than usual cross-legged on the bench, waiting for his friend. Though it was past work-hours, the sun was still hot, and the air heavy. Andrew soon became drowsy. His head went back on the black boards of the shed, for Jonathan's shop was a humble wooden building ; and his eyes closed.

But still the sun glared down on him. It seemed to Andrew that as it travelled down the side of heaven it came nearer, burned brighter, and stared him in the face. He got up impatiently, and tried the forge door, which was closed. It was locked, but he knew where to find the key, under a wreath of wild clematis that Jonathan had trained over the low roof.

He opened the door. The cool darkness

more than rewarded him for the exertion of rousing himself to find the key, which he had done sulkily enough, winking his heavy eyes, and using strong language alternately to the sun and to the door.

Leaving it ajar, he threw himself on a bench, crossed his arms to make a pillow for his head, and fell asleep.

Meanwhile Jonathan was plodding home from a neighbouring farm, where he had been sent for to put the boiler right.

To his surprise he overtook Jael at the top of the village.

"I never expected to see you out again so soon," he said. "And you don't look fit for it now."

"I ain't fit. Nor I don't think I shall be fitter. But I don't like to think o' the school-missus bein' put about because of me. I thought I'd ask Martha Male to give me a cup of tea, and then I'd go and see what I could do at the school-house."

"Mother 'll give you tea, and welcome," said Jonathan, after a pause.

"It 'ud put your father about very like, thank you kindly all the same," she answered. "Abraham Male, he's a still body, and don't make no trouble o' nothin'."

Jonathan felt what she said was true, and pressed her no further.

"The thing as lays at my stomach now," said Jael, breathing heavily from the exertion of walking, "is that there chap's comings and goings over yonder," and she pointed to the school-house on their left.

Jonathan said nothing. They reached the little gate that led up a narrow gravel walk to the forge. A tiny approach it was, not four feet long and hardly two feet wide. But Jonathan had narrowed it by digging a border on either side, where peas, tied to stakes, filled up the back-ground, and large scarlet poppies nodded in the front. Beyond the peas on one side a patch of potatoes se-

parated the forge from the rest of the village. At the other side fields began. The Red Inn and the school-house stood on the opposite side of the road.

So it was a safe place for Jael to speak, and when she was with Jonathan her usual reserve broke down. The burden that lay at her heart could only be eased now by speaking to him. She showed this so plainly that he never had the heart to divert her from the subject. And now, though it pained him, he wanted to hear her speak.

“He’s al’ays a-comin’ and a-goin’. He’s arter the missus sure enough. And to think as she that’s so good and comely is to be matched along of him—it goes agin me that much, Jonathan, I hardly know how to keep my tongue. And yet it ain’t no place o’ mine to be speakin’. I’ll sit down on the bench, Jonathan, agin the door. That walk’s a’most too far for me now, I reckon.”

“I expect it’s too late for you to speak now if it could do any good,” said Jonathan, drily; “the time’s gone by for speaking.”

“You don’t mean to say you think she’s promised herself, do you?” asked Jael, showing in her faded eyes the woman’s keen interest in such affairs, as well as a stronger feeling against Aaron Falk in his unmerited prosperity.

“Jonathan,” she said, when he made no answer, but stood beside her vacantly looking out over the poppies at the dusty road; and she raised her small, withered, worn hand from under the threadbare shawl, and clenched it,—“will you tell me what the A’mighty’s a-doin’ of, that Aaron Falk as has spoiled more lives than one, that’s the cause of my gal bein’ put away in the ‘house,’ that ain’t got no more heart in his body than a cuckoo has—what’s the A’mighty a-doin’ of, that *he’s* gotten’ all he wants, and that another one, as comely as my ‘Scilla, very

nigh, (though I says it) and a deal wiser, should be put in his way and given to him, without no trouble, nor never a word ? The Lord's ways is past finding out — I've thought it many a time, and I'm a-thinkin' it agin to-day."

Jael had dropped her large umbrella with a sharp rap upon the stone before the shop door. When she had finished speaking she rose and stooped to pick it up.

It was then, when Jonathan bent to get it for her, that he noticed for the first time that the door that he had locked was open. Some one had rifled the shop, was his first thought. The last stroke of ill-luck had fallen.

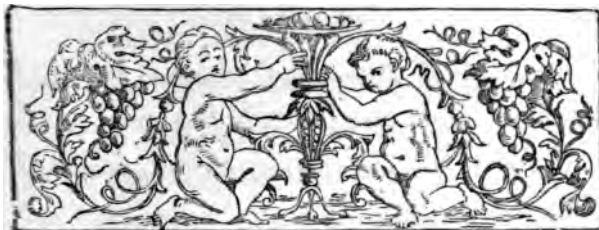
He pushed open the crazy door, and saw no thief, but Andrew, with his mouth and eyes open, leaning forward upon the bench, his eyes red from sleep, and his hair ruffled, but his attitude that of earnest attention.

There was no need for Jonathan and Jael

to look at each other with a mute "Has he heard?"

They both saw he had heard, before he recovered himself enough to stand up and speak to them.

If any of the three doubted, it was Andrew himself, who passed his hand across his forehead, and wondered whether he had slept and dreamed.



CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE FORGE.

JONATHAN threw his cap down, and seated himself on the bench. "Sit down," he said to Jael, pointing to a rough chair propped up against the wall. She was trembling, and her colour had changed. She stood hesitating, uncertain whether to obey Jonathan and her tottering limbs, or the dictate of the nervous terror which had seized her and which would have driven her to the door. She was not a woman who knew fear, and the knowledge that she was afraid now,

and afraid of Andrew, frightened her still further. She sank down in the chair.

Andrew sat on, staring at her, and still silent.

“Don’t look at me like that—don’t, ’Drew, it’s more than I can bear!” she cried, half sobbing, as she untied the faded strings of her bonnet that seemed as if they must choke her. “I did it for the best, I did; I couldn’t ’a told you—Jonathan there, he knows I couldn’t.”

Andrew drew a long breath, and then he said,

“You lied to me, Jael. And I as believed you all through, I as thought you were a true woman, and that you were as dark about it all as me.”

Jonathan touched his elbow. His face said, “Don’t be hard on her, she can bear much now.”

“I couldn’t ’a told you. If I’d ’a told you—Jonathan there, he’ll tell

what 'ud have happened to fader, let alone to me."

"You needn't have lied, woman," said Andrew, fiercely. "You needn't have said by God you didn't know——"

"I didn't say that," she interrupted him—"I said I *couldn't tell you*, 'Drew; no more I couldn't. I have telled ye so all along."

"You *knew* what I meant when I asked you," said Andrew, angrily. "You *knew* I went away and thought we was both in the dark, both on us together. But I might have trusted a woman to be shuffle-tongued. I might have known they'd only say the truth when they meant you to believe a lie."

"'Drew, you needn't pitch into her," said Jonathan. "I've kept the secret as well as her, though I hope I've told you never a lie. I don't think I ever told a lie, knowing it. I never was brought up

in that way, and I never saw good come of it."

"And there won't good come o' this," said Andrew, rising, his colour rushing to his face as he made for the door.

"Hold hard there, and don't be a fool," said Jonathan. "Listen to the reason why we didn't speak, before you blame Jael."

"Reason!" said Andrew, scornfully, "well, out with it then. I should like to know the reason as obliged her to lie about a thing that's so near to me—that's changed all my life like—that's—" He sat down and put his hands over his face, leaving his sentence unfinished.

"We gave our promise not to tell—that's the reason," said Jonathan, "and a good reason too. And if Jael's been put to it how to give you an answer when you kept asking and asking, it's not much wonder."

Jael was wiping the perspiration from her forehead with trembling hands.

“ I can’t stand up for myself, and I ain’t a-goin’ to,” she said, presently. “ I may have done wrong, and if I have it’s not the fust time. But I don’t see as it ’ud have mended things for you if I’d spoken out : and it ’ud have killed fader if that there man had turned him out o’ his bed. He ain’t going to be long in ’s bed, he’s drucken-ing every day ; he won’t live over another fall, he won’t. And while he’s there I’d as lief he were left in peace. You’d lie, may be, ’Drew—if I did lie, but I didn’t—if you could keep the roof over your mother wi’ lying.”

Andrew was silent. Jael’s casuistry was too much for him. He saw the state of things more clearly now. Aaron Falk had used threats to bind over Jael.

“ Villain !” he said, between his teeth ; “ and what’s more, a sneaking villain. But how did he make *you* keep your tongue ?” he said, turning to Jonathan, not with-

out a touch of suspicion or irony in his tone.

“Partly the same way as he made Jael,” said Jonathan a little hotly, looking Andrew in the face; “partly because my head, such as it is, told me that it would be best for you if I held my peace. It would be best if you didn’t know now, I take it. You can’t master yourself now.”

“Don’t fall out,” said poor Jael, seeing both the young men were getting angry; “it’s the A’mighty’s doings, and what are we to say agin it? If I’ve done wrong by you, ’Drew, I’ll ast you forgive it, and wil-lin’. I feels too near my time now, to have no feelin’s agin nobody, and I’d like ’em all be straight wi’ me. So I hope you don’t feel no other than friendly to’ards me, ’Drew; leastways, I hope you won’t, in a while, when you’ve got by this, a bit. I ain’t fit to stop and have words, I ain’t. I’ll be gettin’ on, Jonathan. Good-night to you,

Jonathan. Good-night, 'Drew. My lad,
I trust to you not to speak till fader's gone.
It won't be long you'll have to wait now."

Jonathan watched her out of the little gate, and then came back. Andrew rose, and they stood together in the doorway; he had made no answer to Jael's words, had never answered her good-night.

"The Almighty's doings!" he repeated bitterly, when she had gone. "Maybe that man there," and he clenched his fist, as he pointed to the brewery, "maybe he talks about the 'Lord's doings.' If it's the Lord's doings when women lie, it's the Lord's doings when men sin and ruin their fellow men and women. I hate that talk, I do, about the Lord's doings."

"I believe you're right there, 'Drew," said Jonathan, pacifically, and earnestly, too, for he felt what Andrew said was true; "there's a deal of things put to the Almighty's account that ought to be set down

in our books instead. There's many things we can't understand : when that mill blew up at Hepreth,—the poor little children you'll see there in the hospital, burnt and bruised, and with all manner of sicknesses. But when things are put out of gear all through our wrong-doings, I say with you, it's not fair to blame the Maker. It's plain enough how the mischief came then. But I think you're too hard on Jael. She couldn't do other than hold her tongue."

"She needn't have gone to try and deceive me," said Andrew ; "that's what I can't abide."

"Well, if she did, you mustn't be hard on her. If she was put to it, it wasn't much wonder ; and it's for none of us men to be hard on her. We're truer than women by a long way, I believe—truer than the common sort of women," said Jonathan, slipping in the amendment eagerly ; "but only because we've less to fear. It's fear makes

us lie and be double-tongued—fear and love. And we've not got so much of either of those as the women have, by a long way. Look at Rebecca there, what she did for Jacob."

"Well?" said 'Drew, "and what do you think of her for it?"

"I think it was as mean a trick as ever a woman played. But I tell you what more I think; and that is, that Jacob was a deal meaner."

"I don't see that," said Andrew.

"Don't see it? Why, Rebecca did it for her son, because she cared for him. But Jacob—he robbed his brother, and deceived the old man, too, and all for himself. If he'd have done it for his brother, I think I'd almost say a good word for him, for all he was a sneak. Well, Jael, she did it for her father and for you. She thought it would be the death of him, if Falk turned them out;

and so it would," added Jonathan judiciously, for he was not yet quite sure of what Andrew might do, if Aaron Falk came across his path. "And she knew it would be bad for you to know too; and I think it is bad if you can't be a man and master yourself, now you know the truth. Because you could do no good if you hit Falk on the head to-morrow. But for Jael's sake, and the old man's, you daren't make a business now. You must be as if you didn't know, that's all."

"Yes, it's easy saying, 'that's all,'" said Andrew, impatiently. "If you had set your heart on a girl, as I did, and—" he stopped short, remembering.

"I'd say, that what isn't to be, isn't to be," said Jonathan, looking away from Andrew, and turning his eyes as quickly from the school-house, on which they had rested. "It isn't being a man, to spend

your life fretting after any woman, or any man's wrong-doings."

"It's fine for you," answered Andrew, hastily, "to speak like that. But you ain't been robbed of your sweetheart by the blackest villain that ever broke—"

Jonathan made some sudden movement that caused Andrew to look up. He did not finish his sentence. The expression on Jonathan's face was one that his mate had never seen since he had left Hepreth Hospital. He was not sure that even there he had seen its equal.

He tried to turn the subject. It was for him to smooth things now. He did it awkwardly, as was natural.

"Well, we know what sort of wife you'd like," he said, laughing forcedly. "If she lied, or didn't lie, it 'ud make no odds to you ; you think it's all right for women to be liars. You think so light of 'em."

Jonathan looked down at his friend, for

• he could look down, with the nearest approach to a sneer that was possible to him on his face.

“ If women that can lie would suit me,” he said, “it would be easy finding a wife. They lay to your hand every day. I didn’t come of a woman that lied ; and I’ve no taste for it. But I do feel as I can pity those who have, and who are put in a strait. And as to thinking light of women, I wish to God——”

And then he too broke off. It was the , nearest approach to a confidence he had ever made.



CHAPTER XVII.

“IS IT AY, OR NO?”



WHEN Jael reached the school-house door, she saw Miss Lynn seated at the window writing.

It seemed to Jael as it would have seemed to the other villagers, that this was the most natural occupation for a school-mistress. Indeed Daphne had become amanuensis to many of the Shelbourne folk, her neighbours. If a daughter at service were ill, and inquiries had to be made to set the mind of an anxious mother or lover at rest, or if a son got into trouble

away from home, and the father was confident a letter from him would set him straight, the schoolmistress was the first person to whom they would turn to write such a letter.

She was pleased to be of use to them, and they all thought "she did make out a beautiful letter." All the more perhaps were they satisfied because she wrote down exactly what they wished to say in exactly their own words. Only by the force of habit she naturally corrected the grammar, and wrote words as Dr. Johnson spells them, and not as they sound.

It was not for poor Jael to discover that Miss Lynn was writing a letter a little out of the common sort to-day. But she did notice that the glib pen hesitated for long moments together, that her face looked a little care-worn and anxious, and that at the same time there was the least flush of excitement on her cheek.

Daphne Lynn, usually so composed and serene, had been anxious if not troubled for ten days past. That evening after the school-feast, as they walked through the shrubbery at the Place, Aaron Falk had asked her to be his wife. Jonathan had guessed rightly in that, but in one thing (and that a very vital point) he had jumped too hastily to a conclusion. Miss Lynn had not accepted the brewer's offer.

But neither had she refused it.

Her mind was unsettled. She liked Aaron Falk, and she was flattered by his devotion. She felt that in wishing to make her his wife he must be acting with complete disinterestedness. Everything pointed unmistakably to the fact that what would be a good marriage for her would be a very poor one for him. She esteemed him as an honourable man, who was acting honourably and generously towards her. She was touched by his goodness to her mother, and that was a

very tender point with her. If her mother could be happy, and spend her last days in peace beside her, if she herself could pass a life that would allow of her devoting her time more to her than she could at present, these would be great inducements to Daphne to accept the brewer's offer.

And in accepting it, she would be taking a step that would please Mrs. Lynn as nothing else could. Long since she had set her heart upon it. Long since she had taken the line of appearing to believe no other issue was possible. It had pained Daphne at first, but little by little, as the course of things began to run more smoothly, the mother became more silent and discreet, ("leaving well alone," as she and Mrs. Myse whispered together—) and the daughter more reconciled to the possibility.

Reconciled? she would have said to herself, if the word had forced itself upon

her; what was there to be reconciled to? She liked Mr. Falk and he loved her. It was everything that could be desired; her lines had surely fallen in pleasant places.

She felt no passionate attachment springing up, after daily intercourse with him, it is true. She did not feel it even after the declaration of his love. But she said to herself that it was not in her nature to love passionately. She was born for the ports and calms of life. And how many people made shipwreck of their passionate loves, after all! And Aaron Falk was so much older than she was, there must naturally be a large preponderance of respect in her feelings towards him. Boys and girls fell in love in random foolish fashions. But she, the schoolmistress, twenty-four years of age, and wooed by a man no longer young (in her eyes at least), must not go in for such follies.

She had no past story to tell her what

love might be, she was not as yet tempted by its sweetness to forego everything for it.

And yet she could not give Aaron Falk an answer when he asked her to marry him, in the shrubbery-walk. She told him the plain truth—that her mind was not made up, that the step was too momentous to be taken hurriedly, before she was sure whether they could be happy or not.

“*Happy?*” he had repeated after her, and the tone of fervour and of pain in his voice frightened her. His confidence, his eagerness, were such a contrast to her cold uncertain frame of mind, to her composed, chilly sentences. If he expected her to respond in all their intensity to these feelings, she had better refuse him at once.

She told him so ; but he was touchingly humble, touchingly content to wait. To hear she had not any feeling of repugnance to him was a relief ; to hear he might hope, had made “all the difference in his life.”

And for ten days she had been communing with herself about the answer. To-night, she had told herself, it must be given; her mother had been telling her so for nine days past.

But before she wrote it she forced herself to look honestly, as she thought, into her own heart. There were no secrets there; but were there any leanings? Could she ever repent afterwards if she married Aaron Falk? Could she say, "I have known nobler men than him?"

She answered that she did not know enough of Mr. Falk to decide this utterly. But all lovers must leave something to the future, something for experience to decide. The lover could not quite show what the husband would be, nor the woman that is being wooed, the wife. She marvelled when she thought of her lover's perfect faith in her: how could he know for certain that she would make him happy?

She allowed to herself, as she sat combing her hair before the little glass upstairs, the morning before the letter was written, that other men (she put it carefully in the plural) had moved her sympathies more than Mr. Falk. She had seen other men lead nobler lives than she knew him to lead, but that was only, perhaps, because she had heard of incidents in other men's lives, while she had heard little or nothing of Mr. Falk's life. And if these other men had awakened feelings of sympathy, of very warm and deep sympathy in her mind, she had called forth little or no response in them. A noble man, if he had loved her, might have roused a deeper feeling than she could have *at present* for Aaron Falk. At present, said Daphne with marked emphasis, leaving a wide sea of possibilities of good in the future ; *might*—but what was the use of wasting life in “mights” and “mays” that could not be?

All through the mazes that she wound

through, Daphne kept up the plural number. Other *men*—other *lives*. And yet she was thinking of one man, seeing one face, admiring one life; and knowing that the one man who could have conquered her affections neither cared to do so nor dreamt of making the attempt.

That Mr. Falk loved her was certain. That she liked him was certain. That she could keep him no longer waiting for an answer was certain.

And that when she accepted him she would make no show of a depth of feeling of which she was innocent, was quite as certain.

In the evening she sat down to write her letter.

"Dear Sir," she began. It was hardly the way to address an accepted lover. She took up another sheet of paper, and wrote—

"DEAR MR. FALK,—I have been considering for ten days past the question you

put to me. I beg your pardon for having so long kept you waiting for an answer. Perhaps you will forgive me more readily when I tell you that I am prepared to give you the one I believe you desire. I do not pretend that my feelings towards you are such as those you have so kindly expressed to me. But I feel your generosity and kindness very deeply, especially in the way you have acted towards my dear mother, in offering her a home, and it will always be my pleasure as it will be my duty to show you I am not ungrateful."

After some hesitation, Daphne added, "I shall be away from home to morrow morning, but my mother and I shall be glad to see you towards evening, if you feel inclined to come."

She smiled to herself as she read over the last sentence. She was half ashamed of it. Inclined to come? Of course he would be inclined to come. It was just be-

cause she knew he would be so much inclined, so irrepressibly anxious to come, that she had told him she would be out in the morning. She would go up to see old Josiah Thorne.

She looked up as she signed her name, and saw Jael at the front door, knocking.

Telling her to take a seat, Miss Lynn folded and addressed her letter, and went out to see if there were any child about who could carry it to the brewery. Perhaps it would have been wiser if she had given it to a grown-up person; for her scholars could read writing, and many adults in Shelbourne could not. But Miss Lynn cared little for what people said, when there was nothing to be ashamed of. And, after all, to-morrow all Shelbourne would know she was going to marry Aaron Falk.



CHAPTER XVIII.

COUNTING THE COST.

MISS LYNN was ashamed of herself next morning when she found herself hurrying out after breakfast, instead of staying at home in a state of happy expectancy.

She had not yet told her mother that her answer had been given. If she had, Mrs. Lynn would have loudly protested against the unfeeling conduct of her daughter to her betrothed. Mr. Falk told to *wait till the evening* to come to the school-house, after Daphne had accepted him ! Such a

thing would have shocked Mrs. Lynn's sense of propriety in a degree not easily to be described. She had thought her daughter a little too independent in her behaviour to her rich wooer all along. This would have been the final piece of imprudence, in her anxious eyes.

So Daphne kept her mother in ignorance of her happy decision till Mr. Falk's visit became dangerously near.

She was glad to escape into the fresh air that morning, and to take the well-known walk across the fields to the Thornes' cottage. Carefully she surveyed the prospect as she went, for she did not want to come on Mr. Falk again among his sheep. She could not disguise from herself the fact that she knew him too little not to dread their first meeting under these altered circumstances. Cool and composed as a kind host and neighbour, she had liked him ; as a lover, she had felt less at her ease with him ;

as her future husband, she could hardly as yet tell what her feelings towards him might be. And the unknown has always something of the fearful about it. It was so to Miss Lynn, though she wondered at and was a little perplexed by her own misgivings.

But no Mr. Falk started up in the meadows or leapt forth from behind the elm-trees ; only his cows looked up lazily at Daphne as she passed.

At the top of the meadow, where all Shelbourne, on the one hand, and the top of the Thornes' cottage and Hephreth in the distance on the other, could be seen, she turned and stood still, looking back at the village. There stood the brewery, large and prosperous ; Mr. Falk's stables, where the Virginian creeper grew ; the brewery-house itself, a snug nest among evergreens and elm-trees, its pretty gables covered with creepers, the thin blue smoke rising from its kit-

chen chimney; the garden, bright as butterflies' wings, lying in the sun, the velvet lawn on the left sweeping to the road below. A figure was moving about in the garden. Daphne strained her eyes to see if it were her betrothed. But no, it was a man in his shirt sleeves, trimming the edges of the grass along the walks.

She could not help a flush of pleasure, knowing it would be all hers. The comfort, the ease, the pretty home-like house, above all the garden—it took her breath away to think of it. No more toiling over books and slates all day; freedom to do as she liked, and money to spend on what she liked. To have her mother with her, and to make her last days happy; and above all, to be a mother to the parish like Mrs. Myse, wine to give to sick people, milk and dinners to little Lily, help of all sorts to Josiah Thorne and Jael; the tears came into her eyes thinking of it all. She felt

she hardly deserved to be the possessor of so many things she cared for.

And then she blushed, thinking how she had come out that morning to escape meeting the man who was to give it all to her, the man she must promise to love, honour, and obey.

And so she would, she said to herself. She would try to make him very happy ; she had made him happy indeed already, by giving him her promise. All the rest, all the right and natural feelings would come in time.

Josiah Thorne's eyes brightened as he turned his head on the pillow to welcome her.

"You been a long time a-comin' to see me," he said feebly. "I didn't think never to see 'e no more agin."

"Oh, don't say that !" said Daphne ; "I hope you will see me many times yet."

And she thought that next time she

came she might have a basket of fresh eggs, a bottle of port wine, and a bunch of grapes to bring with her.

The old man shook his head.

"I'm got i' the walley o' the shadow," he said—"i' the walley o' the shadow—but I'm not through 't yet. I don't count to see another Michaelmas, I don't. Michaelmas he took our rent, did master; al'ays had the rent, I had; didn't have to ask for't twice, he didn't. Nice gen'leman he were, and a good master to me. Forty year I worked along o' him."

"Who was he?" asked the schoolmistress.

"Muster Falk, Muster Falk, who else?" said the old man impatiently. "Never were no other like him. I been in a deal o' parts, nine miles t'other side of Heprath I been, and niver heerd tell o' another like him."

"Was he—was he Mr. Falk's father?" asked Miss Lynn, colouring a little.

“Muster Aaron we called him, i’ my time. I hear tell as folks speaks well o’ him; but my gal and he fell out, I count, and——”

“Hev yer piller moved, fader?” asked Jael, coming up to the bedside, and fidgeting with the pillows, unnecessarily, as Daphne thought.

But Miss Lynn’s curiosity was aroused. She must hear all she could now about Aaron Falk, since she was trusting her happiness to him.

“What have you to do with him?” she asked, looking at Jael and the old man in turn.

“Nothin’!” said Jael, hastily. “He’s our landlord, that’s all. It’s his house, this is, and it’s his land as it stands on, though fader and gran’fader carried the stones here, and put ’em together.”

“*His house?*” repeated Daphne, looking perplexed; “but I asked him once, and

he said—.” And then she stopped herself. If Aaron Falk had not told her the exact truth, or had not appeared to do so, she was the last person that must betray him.

Jael gave a hasty shrug.

“He *said* a deal, I warrant,” she answered, sulkily as Daphne thought. “Say in’s easy.”

Daphne felt a something between a short breath and a sigh rising, and stopped it.

“Let me read to you, Thorne,” she said, and she took down the old dusty Bible.

She thought it would soothe her, as it always did, as she saw it soothed the old man who had got “into the valley.”

But the Psalm she fell upon at hazard was in the key of her own thoughts :

“Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle?
who shall dwell in Thy holy hill ?

“He that walketh uprightly, and worketh

righteousness, and *speaketh the truth in his heart.*"

It was a small matter—a very small matter—that Aaron Falk should have equivocated when she had asked him whether the miserable tumble-down cabin were his.

And yet the knowledge of it took the sweetness out of Miss Lynn's walk home.

Jael's sulky words might have been spite. But what was to explain the evasion from the truth, of which she herself was *certain*?

Suppose he were not utterly noble, then, after all? Suppose *there were*, after all, nobler men than he?

Her thoughts still came in the Bible language she had so lately used at Josiah Thorne's bedside. As she went down the slope of the meadow, and looked again at the house that was to be her home, a voice seemed to say to her, "Turn away thine eyes from beholding vanity."

She did turn away her eyes, not because

she could make answer to the voice that she knew it to be vanity: but because the sight of it did not make her as happy as it had made her before.



CHAPTER XIX.

“THERE IS A TIDE IN THE AFFAIRS OF MEN.”



HE brewer did not feel quite happy about his reception that evening. Daphne was not exactly cold in her manner; indeed, under the circumstances, he felt it would have been hardly possible for her to be so; but he did not think she was quite as cordial as she ought to have been.

He was too much attached to her, however, and too happy in the promise she had given him, to think much of trifles. She was undemonstrative by nature, and he

must not expect her to feel for him as he felt for her.

So he argued, until it chanced to slip out that she had been up to see the Thornes in the morning. After that, any coldness of manner or words, rather, any want of the natural warmth he had expected, assumed a more serious appearance in his eyes.

Daphne noticed that his countenance looked a shade less radiant, and with the faint suspicion of some injustice or hard-dealing to Jael and her father in her mind, she was wide awake to everything that might throw a light upon the subject. If there was anything to be known discreditable to the man she was about to marry, she had better know it at once. If he were indeed a hard landlord, she must let him know now that she disapproved of him in that character.

Yet his very change of countenance at the mention of Jael's name made her afraid to

try and find out the whole truth. She did not know him well enough to ask him why he had denied that the cottage was his. Indeed, the reason of that seemed plain enough : a lack of moral courage in a very small matter. She had complained that the cottage was miserably out of repair, and he had shuffled, and said it was not " exactly his." Yet Jael said he was her landlord.

Daphne, who would forgive enormities in Eliza Ann, and pity the erring and the malicious all round her with a divine pity, was yet inexorable in her demands upon the man that was to be her husband. Him she *must* look up to, and honour ; there was no alternative, she felt, but that of contempt.

And yet she tried to shake all doubts of Aaron from her. She heard him call her " Daphne " for the first time with no other feeling than a little surprise. She gave him a flower when he went away, feeling she ought to make amends to him, and sent

him off happy. She reproached herself when he had gone, thinking how good and kind he had been, how dutiful to her mother; and wondered at her own perversity. She had told him she could not marry yet; that she must consult Mr. May and Mrs. Myse first; that time must be given them to find a new schoolmistress. And to this resolve she remained firm. Two or three months' time she must have.

And yet Aaron Falk went home in a glory of sunlight, loving so much himself, that he thought he was loved more.

And after this things went smoothly on. The school opened again, till a new mistress could be found; and the brewer came every evening to tea, or to walk with Miss Lynn. All the village knew they were to be married before long, and all the village was pleased, with very few exceptions.

Mrs. Bellar was one. "Hartful 'ussy,"

she said, shaking her head, and the mane upon it, that would have been tawny but for frequent applications of "Family Hair-grease"—"Hartful 'ussy! she set her cap at 'im all along, from the very fust. *She* won't go dry for want o' asking drink. Stuck up *she'll* be when she gits in that there house, suvvents and all, and things she ain't never so much as seen through a bermometer. Pity her suvvents I do, if she treats 'em as she did my poor gal; nothin' but a bag o' bones she were when she took her by her poor shoulders and knocked her out o' the house. I daresay she thought I'd come a-scramblin' and a-beggin' and a-prayin' on my knees for her to take her back—as if *I'd* go to 'umble myself so to *any* lady, let alone *her*. Eliza Ann, my dear, come here, that's a darlin'.—Ah, you Billy there—you sinner, you young varmint, wait you till I bring the stick about your bones, and make 'em rattle!"

Andrew kept silence, because he saw there was little use in speaking, and believed that to speak would be to ruin Jael, who, though inadvertently, had been the cause of his finding out the black secret at last. But he changed his work, and his employer, and walked three miles out of Shelbourne every day, that he might avoid coming upon Aaron Falk. He loathed him so that he would have gone farther than that to escape a meeting with him. If he met him, he could not tell what the consequences might be. He never spoke of him to Jonathan ; but they both knew, like their neighbours, that Miss Lynn was going to marry the brewer. Sometimes the two young men would see them walking through the fields in the September evenings ; and both, with one consent, would change their course, to avoid them.

“ It seems we’ve got nothing to do with folk that are happy, you and I, ’Drew,”


said Jonathan once, when they had thus avoided the lovers; "our lives don't seem to fall that way."

His voice had a half-defiant, half-miserable tone.

"No, nor yet with folks that are bad, I hope," his mate answered, in a tone more defiant, if less miserable.

But Jonathan was happier about his friend, at least. Andrew was less fierce against Aaron Falk than Jonathan feared he might have been. And as for 'Scilla, Jonathan took great comfort in the fact that 'Drew had almost ceased to speak of her. The wound had left its scar, but it was surely fast healing.

So things went on, Daphne being drawn nearer to Aaron Falk by much intercourse, and by the force of his unwearying devotion: Andrew and Jonathan being drifted away by the tide of fate from all that had once



seemed dearest to them ; and still, as men must, living and working on.

It was late in September, and the wedding had been fixed for the middle of October, before anything of importance happened in Shelbourne to disturb the even monotony of its days.

Mr. Falk, calling one morning with a message for Miss Lynn, and a hope of seeing her before school hours, was told by her mother that she was not at home ; that she had been called to the Thornes' cottage the evening before, and had no doubt spent the night there. A labourer had come to say that, passing by the end of the lane, he had seen a red handkerchief tied to a stick out of one of the windows. Thinking something was amiss, he went to the door. Jael had opened it for him, telling him the old man, her father, was at the point of death ; but she could not leave him to look for help, and that it was by the mercy of God that

he had noticed her signal of distress, and come to her.

“And it’s you as she’d like to see, missus,” said the man to Miss Lynn; “she thinks the old man ’ud like to see you afore he goes.”

Daphne did not need to be asked twice; but, carrying a bottle, with some brandy in it, under her shawl, she went as fast as her feet could carry her, through the darkness, across the meadows, and up the lane.

Jael burst into tears when she saw her.

“Oh, the Lord’s pitiful and of great mercy, after all. I’m not afeard for to be alone with him when he goes; but I thought there weren’t no one to speak a good word for him to the Lord, nor yet to say no good words to him hisself as ’ud cheer him up. And I couldn’t send for the minister; maybe he’d come, but it ’ud likely be the death on ’im, comin’ out o’ nights.”

“I’m very glad you sent for me,” said

Daphne. "I can't often be of use. I shall stay with you through the night."

She took off her shawl and bonnet, and put some brandy in a cup, the only one that was not broken. Then the two women went up the ladder together.

"He is very ill," said the schoolmistress, leaning over him, and watching the snatched short breathing, "but it is not death, Jael, —not at present."

"Do you think there'd be time, then?" asked Jael, eagerly. "I'd like send for my gal, if there'd be time. She'd fret, maybe, if she didn't see him afore he goed."

"Could we send her a message?" asked Daphne.

"Jonathan 'ud take it, that he would, if he knowed I were in trouble," she answered. "We'd best wait to daylight, and then I'll get him to go."

"I will go and see him, or get some one else," said Daphne, "as soon as it is at all

light. And then your girl could be here early in the forenoon."

She made Jael lie down upon her bed, while she sat by the old man's side. Jael, who was weary, slept heavily. Daphne kept awake, and as soon as the first pink stole into the sky, she put on her bonnet, and slipped out of the house.



CHAPTER XX.

JAE'L'S MESSAGE.

T was a relief to her to pass from the stillness and gloom of the poor garret, where the shadow of death seemed already to be brooding, into the freshness of the early September morning.

All the lane, as she went down it, was glistening with dew-drops, the grass and ferns were spanned over by myriads of gauzy spider-webs ; the few birds of autumn were gabbling and chirping over their breakfast ; and slowly the sun was riding up the hea-

vens, and sending a glow and a glory over the stubble in the reaped fields.

It seemed to Daphne that she was the only living thing that had not rested. Even the ferns, late as it was in their little lives, had shaken the dust off their fronds, and bathed themselves in sun and dew, and were standing up fresh and feathery in the hedge-rows.

And she was chilly and tired. Her head and limbs were aching. She thought it was from want of sleep and the anxiety of watching. But, after all, the old man had given her little cause either to keep awake or to be anxious. He had slept all through the night, after she had arranged his pillows and raised his head ; only his short fitful breathing, and a thick husky cough showed it was more the sleep of exhaustion than of rest.

But her mind had been busy all through the night. She had made many plans as

she sat by the old man's side looking for the morning. Jael should not lack a friend when the old man was taken ; it would be in her power now to befriend her, and Aaron would befriend her. All the people spoke of him as good and kind to the poor.

The cock on the church spire was all ablaze, as Daphne passed out of the damp grass in the meadow on to the village road.

The village itself was alive now with the tramp of labourers' feet, the opening and shutting of the doors as they came out, and the whistle of the younger men, on whom life's burden sat lightly.

Andrew Male stood in his doorway pulling on his coat ; Martha, neat as if it were mid-day, was putting some bread and cheese into his wallet ; other wives and mothers, with their hair awry in nets, or tucked up hastily with a hair-pin, were beating mats

against the garden railings, or pulling their sleepy boys out of bed.

Many stopped open-mouthed to see the schoolmistress going past at that early hour, and making for Jonathan Cleare's house.

Mrs. Cleare was arranging her cap at the window upstairs when Miss Lynn knocked at the door. The sound did not reach her dull ears, and it was a heavy footstep from behind the house that came at the summons.

Jonathan, in a coarse linen jacket, as clean as his mother's apron, and with a trowel smeared with mortar in his hand, came round the corner.

Daphne Lynn, as she came through the village, and up the little garden, had felt, she could not tell why, a little fear of meeting Jonathan. She knew it must be all fancy, and yet she could not help fancying that of late, when he had met her, he had tried to avoid her. Had she ever shown him that she liked and respected him? She coloured

at the very thought, but her conscience acquitted her. It had never been her misfortune to care for those who did not value her friendship ; she had never been more than friendly, to use the strongest word, to Jonathan Cleare.

And as she stood at the door, and heard his footsteps coming round the corner, she drew herself up, and said to herself that as the promised wife of Aaron Falk, she need feel no false modesty with other men. Of late she had not been to see Mr. Cleare ; but now it was well she should make friends with all the village people ; it might be in her power to do them all in turn some service.

“ I come with a message from Jael Thorne,” she said to Jonathan ; “ the old man is very ill, and Jael is very anxious to see her daughter ; I think her name is Priscilla, and she is in the workhouse ; do you know her ?”

“ Yes, I know her,” said Jonathan, “ and I suppose Jael wants her to come out ?”

“ Yes : she said you would go for her, if you knew she was in trouble. But you are busy, I see.” And she looked at his dusty hand, and the trowel.

His sore heart, taking all things amiss, read her look as one of contempt, or at least of condescension.

“ I’m always busy,” he answered curtly ; “ some must work if the world’s to go on ; and I was not one that was born with a silver spoon, as some folks are.”

His tone more than his words hurt Miss Lynn.

“ You speak as if I despised work,” she answered, colouring. “ I that have worked all my life, till now. I despise those who cannot work, and I do not know why you misunderstand me.”

She looked up at him, and meeting his clear grey eyes, looked down again. She

would not part with him so. If there was any man in the village she respected more than another, it was this man ; and she had enough vanity to be pained and indignant at his wilful desire to quarrel with her.

Bodily fatigue had made her weak, as it makes most women. The tears started to her eyes against her will ; they sometimes did so when her mother spoke sharply to her.

And she knew that Jonathan was standing there, watching her face.

She dared not look up again, for fear he should see these meaningless tears, which, in his unkind frame of mind, he might interpret to mean anything. She spoke with her head down.

“ Can you go, or shall I look for some one else to send to Hephreth ? ”

“ I'll go,” said Jonathan, in a subdued voice ; “ tell Jael I'll go myself.”

"Thank you," said Miss Lynn, "she seemed to wish you should go yourself to break the news to Priscilla. Good-morning."

She turned and went quickly out of the garden. Jonathan stood still, watching her, not moving to open the gate.

When his little mother came down, five minutes after, he was still standing there, twisting the trowel in his hands.

"Your breakfast's ready, Jonathan," said her gentle quavering voice, at the door ; "I've got a bit o' fresh fish for you, to-morning ; it tastes beautiful, it does."

He threw off his white coat, and changed it for a better, washed his hands at the pump in the garden, and drank off his cup of tea ; and then, without stopping to taste the fish, he cut off a piece of bread from the loaf, and was off to Hepreth.

'Scilla was a strange girl, and would not come at everyone's bidding. He and Jael

knew that, and that was why she was so anxious that he should fetch her.

"I don't never feel hungry of a 'mornin', I don't; I'm a bad mornin' woman," said Mrs. Cleare, "but I don't like to see Jonathan go out fastin'. His father, he took his victuals well, when he were a young man, same's Jonathan."

"Well, it ain't done *him* not much good, not to speak of," said Martha Male: "my way is to let the men take or not take, as their nature is. Nothin' don't do you good as your stomach set against. It's a waste o' good cooking and good victuals; and it's my thinkin' that more men die of too much drink than die of too much fastin'."

By eight o'clock there was no change in the old man's state, and Miss Lynn went home, promising Jael to return in the evening, or earlier if she was sent for.

"I'd take it kind if you'd come again," said Jael, sitting up wearily in her bed;

“There ain’t no one to speak a word for him to the Lord, not if he goes in the night-time. Minister, he’ll be sure to come in the day: I wouldn’t have him do no other.”

Daphne Lynn went back, very weary, to her day’s teaching. As she put on her bonnet again that evening, to start for the Thornes’ cottage, she looked forward with more than usual satisfaction to the time—a little more than a fortnight hence—when she should be her own mistress, and the drudgery of school-work would be over.

She promised her mother not to stay with Jael all night, unless she found that she had no choice but to remain. Indeed, she felt little equal to another night without sleep in the hard chair by Josiah’s bed.

Mr. Falk, who had come late in the afternoon to see her, had been very much opposed to her leaving home again. It was not her place to nurse Josiah Thorne, he

said. He would willingly pay a suitable person to wait upon him.

"You are very kind," Daphne had said, with quiet decision, "but it's not quite a matter of money. He fancies that he likes to have me there; and I know I like going. I shall not stay later than nine, unless Jael is afraid to be left alone, because my mother wants me to come back."

"*I* should wish you to come back, too," said Mr. Falk. There was an assumption of something like authority in his tone that startled Miss Lynn.

"I am sorry if you disapprove, but I feel I should be wrong if I did not go." Then, thinking she had spoken hastily, that she was not quite dutiful to him, she added more gently, "It is so seldom I can be of use to anyone, Aaron."

He relented as she looked wistfully at him. He thought it was the softest, kindest expression that had ever lighted up her face

when she was alone with him. He had seen the look before ; but it was given to her mother, or to some of the little children in the school.

“ I know you will always do right. God bless you, Daphne,” he said, as they parted. When she had gone a few steps up the field, for he walked with her to the gate leading into it, he followed her, and taking both her hands in his, he looked into her face.

“ I want to thank you for looking at me as you did just now. It is the first time, dear, that you have looked at me as if you trusted me. You don’t know what you are to me, Daphne. I don’t suppose you ever will know.”

“ Why not ?” she said, looking up surprised. Her head had been turned away from him.

“ I don’t know why I said that. I hope you will know later, when you are my wife.

Perhaps you will get to care about me a little more then."

"I am afraid I have been undutiful to you," she said, "or you would not say all this."

"Perhaps I have said too much," he answered: "but I care for you so much, that I have a horrible dread sometimes that you may cease to like me—to—. But it is a very little time that I have to wait now. I won't keep you longer, it looks like rain."

He held both her hands still in his own. Now he stooped, and kissed them.

"Good-night, Aaron," she said, gently, and turned away. He stayed by the gate, watching her, till she was out of sight.

She was touched by his tenderness. She looked back, and waved her hand to him.

And after she was gone he still stood there, watching the path she had taken.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE BREAK OF DAY.

“**T**HOUGH you’d come,” said Jael’s voice wearily, from the garret, before Miss Lynn had begun to climb the ladder. “The day’s been terrible long without you. Fader he’s been a-frettin’ for ye wonderful.”

“How is he? And has your daughter come?” asked the schoolmistress, untying her bonnet and sitting down by the old man, where Jael had given up her seat.

Jael shook her head.

“Jonathan’s been arter her, but the

child's ailin' and she couldn't come. She'll come to-morrow, early, maybe, if the doctor 'ud let the child out;—she thinks a deal more o' that than o' her gran'-fader."

Daphne looked at the old man, and then at Jael, who read her look.

"She'll be too late. He's a-goin' fast. Doctor come to-mornin'. He said he might last till evenin', or till break o' day, but he couldn't no longer."

Miss Lynn saw that the doctor must be right. The short breathing of the morning had become quicker, and more uncertain. As night came on, there was a painful rattle in the throat as well.

"That's death," said Jael, as she sat at the foot of her own bed, her face covered with her hands. She had become a fatalist now, as most of us perhaps become, when death or sorrow meet us face to face in the pathway, and we see there is no turning

back. She had given up using the stimulants the doctor had ordered.

“Not always,” said Daphne. “But I do not think he can last very long.”

He was almost unable to swallow now, though he still spoke a word or two, with long pauses between. He said Jael’s name often, ‘Scilla’s once. But he had no cares to disturb his peace.

“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” read Daphne, “I will fear no evil.”

His eyes brightened then for the last time. He tried to turn his head upon the pillow. The words were familiar to him, and he smiled.

When the psalm was finished, he nodded his head in pleased content, and closed his eyes. Daphne thought it was one of the most beautiful sights she had ever seen. The smooth bald head, the prominent but finely shaped nose, the refined, sweet mouth,

and the child-like blue eyes looking out above the thin wrinkled cheeks, on which the work of ninety years had left its traces. The ineffable peace, and freedom from all fear of death, in strange contrast with the poverty of the poor garret, and the gloom of the gathering night outside the rattling window—there was something wonderful and moving in it all; and Daphne, watching the old man by the light of a candle, that threw its dim rays far enough to show Jael still sitting at the foot of her bed and rocking herself gently to and fro, forgot that she was weary, and that this was the beginning of another sleepless night.

Pattering against the crazy window came the rain that Aaron Falk had foreseen. Now and then sheet lightning divided the sky, and sent a pale glamour over the elm, and the tops of the orchard-trees. There were awful silences, as before a storm; and then the wind rose and soughed dreamily,

and rose again, and battled in the branches ; and the wet leaves on the nearest boughs beat against the window-panes, and made weird noises, like the crying of an infant in the dark.

After a while Daphne changed her seat, and took her place by Jael's side.

"Can't you sleep a little, Jael ? I would wake you at the slightest change. I am going to stay here. It is too wet to go home, if I wished it ; and, in any case, I should stay to-night."

"It's too late for ye to go home," Jael answered, rousing herself for a minute, and comforted that she could not lose her friend. "It must be nigh on midnight," she added, looking out at the window, where a black line marking the horizon was all that could be seen through the sparkle of the rain drops and the shivering of the wet leaves.

Miss Lynn looked at her watch, and found Jael was right. She had learnt from the

face of nature to guess at times and seasons better than those who could read and write. She had not had a clock for many a long year, and yet she knew the hour for supper and for bed as well as the birds in the copses.

She sat down by Daphne, who covered her shoulders with a shawl, for she was shivering. It was useless to ask her to sleep, now that she knew her father's time must be so short. She was more faithful to her post than they whom the Saviour asked to watch by Him. Sorrow, that made them heavy, had made her wide awake.

"It won't be long before I go arter him," she said, breaking the silence suddenly.

"Jael, for Priscilla's sake you shouldn't wish that."

"'Scilla? what can I do for her? I ain't fit to work no more. There's on'y the work'us afore her—on'y that."

"Don't say so," said Daphne earnestly,

laying her hand on Jael's, which was very cold. They were talking in hushed voices, not because they could disturb Josiah Thorne, who was past that, but because it was the chamber of death. "Don't say so, Jael! 'Scilla shall not stay in the work-house. I can prevent it now—I shall be able——"

Jael only shook her head again. A bitter smile, that Miss Lynn did not see, was on her face.

"Don't shake your head," Daphne went on eagerly. "If anything happens to you, I will take care of Priscilla. You know, Jael," she added, "things are going to change with me now. Priscilla can come and be my servant. Mr. Falk——"

Jael lifted up her face and looked at Daphne with a pitying, and yet half-scornful expression, quite new to her. Before Miss Lynn had time to try and interpret it, Jael broke out,

“Poor dear, little you know what you’re sayin’ of! The thin’ you’re speakin’ of can’t never be. And don’t speak of it to *him*—for the love o’ the Almighty don’t name it to *him*! I wants to die i’ the old house like fader. I don’t want to go i’ the work-us for the little while I’ve got left—”

Miss Lynn’s disturbed, anxious face brought Jael to herself.

“I’m light-headed,” she said, “trouble’s made me light-headed. Couldn’t you rest, my poor dear, on my bed?”

Daphne had stood up. Some impulse made her feel she must leave Jael’s side; some vague notion that this would ease the pain Jael had inflicted. What could it mean? What did it all mean?

She walked across the room in a dreamy state, and was about to sink into the chair by the old man, when the candle flaming up suddenly, showed her that the face she had left on the pillow had changed its look.

"Death," said Daphne to herself, though she had not seen that look more than once or twice before.

And it was death. A little before the dawning, just at the time he always fancied he heard the master's voice calling him, the great Master had called Josiah Thorne, and this time he had answered to the call.

Jael rose like King David when his child was dead. She folded away her grief, and thought no longer of herself.

"Go away you," she said to Daphne, "you ain't used to such things. No one shan't touch fader but me. I've always done by him sin' ever mother went, and I'll do for him now."

Daphne went to the window, and looked out into the night. When she left it a few moments after, the last service had been rendered to Josiah Thorne, and he lay sleeping under a snow-white sheet.

Jael pointed to it.

"I've had that by me this many a month," she said. "I wouldn't never use it, so as he'd have it clean against he went."

She took some sprigs of rosemary and lavender from a drawer, and laid them on it.

"And now you'll sleep," she said, "for 've done all for him as you could. It was his time to go, and he's went. The Lord 'll not find nought amiss with him ; he al'ays loved the Lord, and keeped his goin's straight. On'y—I'd have praised Him if so be He'd let my gal seen him afore he went."

She was pointing to her own bed while she spoke.

"I am not tired," said Daphne, wearily enough; "you must sleep there, Jael."

"I? I'm goin' to keep along o' him. I ain't agoin' to leave him now, till they've put him away."

She laid herself down on the bed where

her dead father lay sleeping, reverently, as if she feared to disturb his rest.

Daphne tried to sit up for a little while; she felt as if she could not sleep in that strange scene, on Jael's wretched bed.

But this very scene, and the death of the old man, had served to drive from her mind the thoughts that troubled her. All seemed nothing in the immediate presence of the angel of death.

And she was young, and her strength was overtaxed.

After a little she threw her shawl over the pallet bed, and stretched herself upon it.

For a moment she heard Jael's regular breathing, and knew she slept.

Then everything faded from her, and she too was sleeping.

Outside the wind was moaning like a lost soul, and the rain was pattering. Within lay the old man, motionless, under the white sheet, with the rosemary on his breast.



CHAPTER XXII.

DAPHNE'S AWAKING.

WHEN Daphne opened her eyes the bright September sun was streaming into the room. The rain-drops had dried away from the window, and the leaves of the elm-tree; the wind had gone down, and everything was changed: she must have slept late, she said, raising herself from the hard bed which sheer weariness had made soft enough for a deep long sleep.

The first sight of the grey shawl under her head recalled the scene of the past

night. The second thing on which her eyes fell was the smooth white sheet stretched over what had, a few hours before, been Josiah Thorne.

It was all true, then ; and yet, how like the truth was to a dream. The wretched room, the poor bed on which she found herself, the dead man lying before her—surely it was a dream. A fortnight hence she was to be the rich brewer's wife, a great lady in the parish ; Daphne hardly knew whether that or this was the most unreal.

At first her bewilderment was too great for fear. But as she came to herself, and saw that Jael was gone, that the dead man alone kept her company, a feeling of awe stole over her. She rose, and casting a hasty glance at the awfully still outline of the figure on the bed, she gathered up her shawl, and began to descend the ladder hastily.

She must be sleeping still, or her eyes were strangely dim and heavy : for that was not Jael whom she saw before her.

It was someone with a look of Jael, but with beauty that Jael had never had. Tall, fair, with wide, child-like blue eyes, a slim, straight figure, and something that is indescribable of beauty and grace in all her movements and gestures ; this was the woman that Daphne saw.

And this must be Jael's child, Priscilla.

Daphne, who had paused in wonder on the ladder, came down slowly. Jael was not in the room. The door was open, and the cool morning air was blowing in. A little breakfast was prepared on the table with more care than was common in the poor home.

Priscilla was standing near the doorway, the sun falling on her dark blue workhouse dress and on her fair hair ; she was looking down at a little child, who, with his back to


the ladder and Miss Lynn, was crawling upon the floor, and clinging to his mother's skirt, making soft, babyish gurglings and cooings.

"You are Priscilla?" said Miss Lynn ;
"I am glad you have come, for your mother's sake, though you are too late to see your grandfather."

"Yes, I know," said the girl, shuddering.

"Is this your poor—your little child?" asked the schoolmistress, gently, a touch of infinite sadness and pity in her voice. So beautiful and so young, what pity could be enough for her?

Priscilla looked pleased at its being noticed. She stooped, and raised the child in her arms. It, too, was in its blue work-house dress ; and as she raised it, meaning to show its face to the stranger, and the child, in a baby ecstasy of love and play, turned its cheek instead on to its mother's shoulder, and clung about her neck, it



seemed to Daphne that they were like two beautiful flowers growing upon the same stem.

And these were paupers, said Daphne; could God have punishment great enough for him who had brought them to this? It should not be so any longer; at any price, Priscilla must be saved from the degradation and danger of a workhouse life.

"Priscilla," she said, coming nearer her, "it must not be as it is now, any longer; the workhouse is not a fit place for you; you would like to come away from it, from the bad people you have to live with, wouldn't you? you would like to come and be"—she hesitated as she looked at the beautiful face—could this girl ever be a servant?—"You would be my servant and my friend, wouldn't you, if it can be managed?"

Priscilla looked a little troubled; she

pressed her cheek nearer to the child's head upon her shoulder.

"You would not have to part with the poor little child altogether," said Miss Lynn. "Your mother would keep that, and you could see it sometimes, you know."

"The school-house isn't far," said 'Scilla, looking happier, but still doubtful.

"It would not be at the school-house," said Miss Lynn ; "I am going to be married ; the Brewery House is going to be my home ; we can't afford to keep a servant just now, but then—"

Jael had come in, with a bundle of sticks in her hand. She was looking at Daphne as she spoke. 'Scilla was looking at her mother, her lips parted, and her cheeks paled. The little child had turned his head, and he, too, was staring, with round baby eyes, at the speaker.

Was it something she read in any of these faces that stopped the words on Daphne

Lynn's lips? Was it the remembrance of Jael's words of last night, with their strange solemnity of utterance—"The thing you're speaking of can never be?"

Daphne did not know; only she knew that at that moment a sudden light came to her, a light to light up darkness and sin. It was the rent in the heavens in the blackness of the still thunder-storm; the flash that brings not daylight, but fire and sword.

She staggered to the doorway, and pushing past Jael, ran down the green lane as if she were pursued.

Heaven and earth were reeling before her; whether she stumbled and fell seemed to matter nothing to her.

And yet, through the dumb horror and despair that had seized her and made her careless of all else, she was conscious of one overmastering fear—the dread of meeting Aaron Falk.



CHAPTER XXIII.

TROUBLE AND TOIL.



HE children had already gathered in the playground when Miss Lynn hurried through it to her home.

She had not forgotten them, nor that she had the daily routine of teaching before her. The force of habit is strong ; and in her miserable agitation she had yet thought of looking at the church clock as she passed, and had been relieved to find it was not quite nine. She could have a few moments to think, and to control herself, before she went among them.

Her first impulse was to run upstairs and lock herself into her own room. But she remembered her mother, who had been left all night—not alone, it is true, for Martha Male had consented to come and sleep in the house, on condition that she should go home at six to prepare Abraham and Andrew's breakfast.

But the mother would be alone now, and she was never very happy without Daphne. So the daughter went straight to her room.

Never before had she been thankful that her mother was blind.

Now, as she caught a sight of her own face in the glass, she could not but be thankful. She felt that in the last hour her face had aged sensibly. She never had much colour : now, though she had walked so rapidly, she was as white as marble. Her mind still full of the dead face she had seen, she started, seeing how like her own

was to it. Was she going to die ? Did people die of trouble such as hers ?

She almost hoped so, till the blind woman turned her sightless eyes on her with that mixture of helplessness and vacancy that only blind eyes wear. Then Daphne knew she must live : that there was something to live for.

Everything was passing from her but this : this only death could take from her.

She sat down by the bed-side, and laid her cheek against her mother's.

She had meant to be brave, and to hide her misery for a while, till she could express it better. What was this weakness coming over her ?

She raised her head, and began to unfasten her shawl, and fold it up.

She had not spoken yet. Her mother thought it was that the old man was dead.

Daphne had not seen many deaths. It

was enough to disturb a stronger woman than her.

The mother, who was peevish enough when her child was well and in prosperity, began now to soothe her in her turn.

“ I see he is gone, my dear. Well, he was very old, you know. The young may go, but the old must, as the saying is. He was quite ready, I hope. I’m sure you’ve been a comfort to them. But you’re terribly tired. Give me your hand. How cold it is—is it so cold this morning? And it’s not as steady as usual. You’re quite overtired, Daphne, my dear. I can’t let you do this again. What will Mr. Falk say, if he sees you like this ?”

Daphne pulled her hand away, and rose from her seat. She walked up and down the room meaninglessly, once or twice, hardly knowing what she was doing. Her mother thought she was beginning to put the room in order.

“ My dear, Martha’s put me straight, and given me a cup of tea. Get your breakfast, and don’t stand about longer. Did you sleep at all ? If not, you are not fit to go to the school. You see, my dear,” and her voice began to have some of its natural petulance, “ these good deeds you take on yourself make you quite unfit for your proper duties. You can’t keep the school to-day. But, after all it doesn’t much matter ; it’ll have so soon to break up. I told Mr. May you must have ten days or so before your marriage, to get your things ready, and that.”

Daphne had thought about her “ things,” like other women. There were half-finished things lying about her now. She turned from them with a sharp pain, only to meet the stab of her mother’s words.

“ I will get you your breakfast, mother,” she said, glad of the opportunity of getting away. “ And I *am* going to have the

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school to-day. I slept a good deal last night."

Mrs. Lynn had her breakfast brought to her. But Daphne went fasting into the school.

"School-missus do look bad," said the elder girls to each other, and to their mothers, when they went home at night.

"She's ta'en the old gen'leman's death wonderful to heart, I take it. And yet it's on'y what's right and natural, poor dear. It isn't many as carries their years so well as Josiah's done."

"I wonder as Muster Falk's willin' for her to be gaddin' about and nursin' of sick folk. She do look a bit delicate."

"Muster Falk? maybe he ain't willin'," said one of the men, with a laugh. "But she's got the rein-hand of him, I count. He's wonderful taken up with her, they tell me. He'll cut every blessed flower as ever grewed in that there glass-house of his, and give 'em

away to her. She's born to luck, she is, and looks like it."

"Don't look like it to-day," said another man. "I happened on her to-mornin' early as she were comin' down the street; and white as a churchyard ghost she were. Didn't like the thoughts of stoppin' along o' the corpse, I reckon. And no blame to her neither."

"She'll be set up very like when she's a fine lady; but she's a nice one now, anyway. A beautiful letter she can make out, and no mistake. And a good turn she'll do for the worst of us."

"It's a bad thing when a woman gets the bit between her teeth," said an older man, shaking his head. "But if there's any as I'd give her head to and trust her to go the right way, it's that young woman."

"I believe the blessin' of the Almighty's on her," said Mrs. Cleare to Jonathan.

“And He’ll direct her ways for her ; I don’t feel no fears o’ that.”

Meantime the longest day of the school-mistress’s life passed by. One only consolation she had to keep her up ; it was, the knowledge that Aaron Falk was out for the day, that he did not expect to be home till evening.

If there had been a chance of his coming to see her at the dinner hour, or after the school closed, she felt she could not have stood up teaching ; trying, and wonderfully succeeding, in teaching as if nothing were amiss.

In our sorest straits the knowledge that we have *time* is very supporting ; though after that time is over, nothing can come but the blow we are avoiding now.

Daphne’s endurance was strained to the last point ; she felt that a meeting with Aaron Falk that day, and the scene that

must follow upon it, would be more than either mind or body could stand.

"Please, 'm, are we to come again to-morrow?" asked the children, when lessons were over. "Mrs. Myse told us as you wouldn't want to be troubled with us no longer; she said there wouldn't be no more school."

"Come again as usual," said Miss Lynn. "I will speak to Mrs. Myse."

"Don't stop to put away anything!" she said, quickly. She felt as if the jar of another slate must make her cry.


They went out, wondering; such an order had never been given before.

Perhaps they would have wondered less if they could have seen her after they were gone, when, locking the school door, she sank down on her knees before one of the desks, and hid her face in her hands.



CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. MAY'S MANDATE.

“HE'S not at home? Well, it does not matter. You will do quite as well, Mrs. Lynn, though I am very sorry not to see her dear face. But I came to say we can't *hear* of her carrying on the school any longer. We think it only fair to Mr. Falk, you know, and to all the people, and indeed to Mr. May and myself, who expect to see her looking,—not *nice*, because she always does *that*,—but particularly sweet and pretty on the great day, that she should have ten days

to prepare. And poor Mr. Falk, you know, he complains to Alfred that he *never* has time to see her. He is quite *aggrieved*, you know, and seems to think it is dear *Alfred's* fault. So, for our sakes, if not for her own, and for the sake of the wedding gown, you know, the school must be closed to-morrow. It is Mr. May's *particular* wish and order you may say to her, Mrs. Lynn. *How* is the good little woman ?”

“She's not well to-day, ma'am. I think she's over-tired. She's wanting in judgment about some things, though I can't find much fault with her. And she would have it she must stay with Jael Thorne because the old man was dying.”

“Ah, yes ; but *how* grateful Jael is to her ! I've just been up there, and she is longing to see her again. The poor child, Priscilla, has come home, but she's of little use to her.”

“Still, it's company for the poor woman,

isn't it, ma'am ? Daphne needn't be thinking she's left alone."

"No, no. Set her mind at rest on *that*, if she doesn't know Priscilla is there. Did she mention to you that she had come ?"

"No, ma'am, she didn't. But she's so very tired to-day. She's spoken little and eaten less. She went out for a little turn half-an-hour ago. She said her head ached."

"Well, remember, it's *settled* that the school does not open to-morrow," said Mrs. Myse, assuming a look of strong-mindedness and decision.

She was slipping on her goloshes at the door over her flat little cloth boots. She always made a point of taking them off as she entered a house, and putting them on as she left it, if there was the slightest chance of their being damp.

"You see I have to be so careful with dear Alfred," she said. "If I were to come

in with anything damp on, he would begin sneezing directly. I believe that, humanly speaking, goloshes have saved my life and his."

"Well, I'm sure we hope you'll always wear goloshes, ma'am," said Mrs. Lynn, with solicitude. "Shelbourne would not get on well without you and Mr. May."

"You are *very* kind to say so. But that reminds me," she answered, laying her hand kindly on the blind woman's arm, "that Alfred and I take *great* comfort, thinking that if we die we shall not leave Shelbourne *quite* to strangers. Your dear daughter and Mr. Falk will be father and mother to our parish, I know."

"Daphne will always try to do her duty in whatever place she's called to, ma'am. I believe that."

"I believe it too, and so does Alfred. It makes us both *very* happy that Mr. Falk is so blessed. He has been something between

a brother and a son to us since we came to Shelbourne. The only thing I long for now is to see him happy. He is *most* patient, but I think he feels this long waiting very much. I never saw greater devotion than his, Mrs. Lynn."

Mrs. Myse looked into the forge as she passed.

"I hear you've been arranging things for poor Jael, Jonathan. I hardly liked to ask when the funeral is to be, she is in such a state of dull grief."

"I saw her this forenoon, ma'am. My mother went to see if she could do anything for her, and she said she'd like me to call. If it's the same to Mr. May she'd let it be the day after to-morrow. It's soon, but it'll be best for her when he's taken away. He'll be put in the coffin to-morrow morning. The men will be there by eight o'clock with it, and I'll go up and give them a hand. She'd like it better than having only strangers."

"I am glad she will let it be soon. But I was afraid she would not be willing: the people mostly have such a feeling against a speedy burial. I think the sooner the *better*, Jonathan, when once God has taken us to rest."


"She's so ailing," he answered, "she made no words about it. She didn't seem to care one way or another. So I named the day."

As Jonathan closed the shop door that night he saw Miss Lynn going in at the school-gate alone.

Andrew, who was waiting for him to come to supper—for the evenings were too short and chilly now, on the verge of October, for evening walks—said as he watched her,

"She's alone to-night. He's gone out for the day, I count. A pity as he can't stop away altogether. It would be a good thing for more than one in Shelbourne."

Jonathan made no answer. He never



did answer now, when 'Drew spoke of Miss Lynn. To listen was hard enough work for him, without speaking.

"I can't do nothing for Jael, I suppose?" Andrew asked, turning the subject. "I sent up word when your mother went, as she was to let me know if I could do anything; but she said you'd promised to see after things for her."

"Yes, I'm going up to-morrow morning. He's to be buried the day after. You'd best not help carry him, 'Drew. I'll get bearers. You aren't strong enough to play tricks with yourself, and it would very like upset you."

"I'd do it if Jael had set her mind on it," said Andrew. "But you know why I'd as lief not go up there that day. I heard as *she'd* be there, from Hepreth: she's safe to come and see the last of the old gen'leman. And I don't feel as I could meet her, not like that, before folk."

“You’re right,” said Jonathan. “But I think all the same you ought to be schooling yourself to face it now. You’ll need to meet ’Scilla some day, ’Drew, sooner or later. You ought to be a man, and make up your mind to it, now you’ve put the thoughts of her out of your mind, like. There’s nothing for you to fear in meeting her. It’s another that ought to fear.”

Andrew was pulling a straw to pieces. He made no answer. He never could argue with Jonathan, least of all now.

“May-be she’s been already,” he said, after awhile, when Jonathan’s thoughts had travelled far away from ’Scilla. “I feel somehow as if she’d been about the place, though I never set eyes on her.”

“She’s there now,” said Jonathan, “but she won’t stay long, only to keep her mother company to-night.”

“To-night ? She’ll be terribly afeard then. She couldn’t never bear to see any

one as was sick, let alone a corpse." He was beginning to look restless and troubled.

"She needn't to be afraid with her mother," said Jonathan, a little indignantly. He was thinking of another woman who Jael had told him had stayed with her through the night, and had slept like a child in the same room with the dead Josiah. And well she might. God and His angels would look after her.

A light shone far into the night from Daphne Lynn's window, but no one noticed it except Jonathan.

He thought she was sitting up to finish her wedding-dress, perhaps : to make the little preparations that he had heard his mother say every happy woman would take a pride in.

He opened the door at twelve o'clock ; and saw the light still burning through the limes in the play-ground. She was *very*

happy : time was flying quickly with her, sure enough.

How could he guess the real truth, or know what it was that kept Daphne Lynn with her head upon her mother's shoulder so far into the night ?

Fool that he was, he said to himself, to watch that light, that meant darkness, if anything, for him.



CHAPTER XXV.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.



MISS LYNN slept badly enough. Such sleep as she had was disturbed by miserable dreams, from which she awoke starting, to a reality no less miserable.

The knowledge that daylight will bring the possibility of something we dread is enough to make sound sleep impossible for most of us. At daybreak Daphne awoke, and could not rest again. She had not only the suffering of the day before to go through, after the short respite of unconsciousness ;

but she awoke to know that by this time Aaron Falk was as wretched as herself.

She had written to him the evening before, and in her walk she had left her letter at his house. She tried now to remember the words she had used and could not ; she only knew that a dread and horror of him had seized her, and that under that dread and horror she had written.

He would find the letter when he came home at night. Now the morning had come, and she might have to face him before an hour or two had passed. The meeting at any time would be a terrible one ; unnerved as she was now by physical fatigue, and unstrung by all she had gone through during the last few days, the thought of it was intolerable. She could not comfort him ; she could give him no hope ; it would be for them both, misery heaped on misery.

There was one way out of it. She could leave the house and escape from him. She rose hastily, dressed herself, and by seven o'clock was downstairs. It was still hardly light. She looked to see that all the blinds were down, and that her mother was sleeping. Then she went noiselessly out of the door, closing it behind her. She looked back, and was satisfied to see that the house looked, and would look for two hours to come, as silent as sleep itself. No visitor would try to gain admittance there. And Mrs. Lynn, who always slept late, and was used to being left much alone, would not attempt to break the spell.

Miss Lynn paused at the gate. Where could she go? The morning air was pleasant to her; she would have gone into the fields or woods at any other time than this, as she had often done on bright happy summer mornings. But Aaron Falk knew she sometimes walked there, and she might

meet him. She must go somewhere where she could be safe from him.

Yesterday she had felt that to return to the Thornes' cottage was impossible. There the blow had fallen upon her ; there there could be no comfort, only in every look, on every face, a confirmation of her fears.

Jael would be alone no longer, she had argued to herself ; there could be no reason for her to go.

Now, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, she turned to the place from which she had fled. Driven between two fears, the fear of being compelled to meet Aaron Falk, and the pain of going again through the sufferings of yesterday, it seemed to her the last was the least evil of the two.

The terrible truth she had faced already ; him she need not face.

Nay, now that she had accepted the truth in all its bitterness, she was conscious

of a half-frenzied wish that it should be confirmed. The miserable alternations of her mind were unendurable. One moment she said to herself it *could* not be, she could not have been so deceived in him. The next moment, a rush of memories overwhelmed her, and she could as little doubt that it was all too true. One moment she asked herself if she had wronged him, if it was all a terrible dream? The next, she fled on faster towards Jael's home, all to escape from a terrible reality.

And Jael would need her now, she said to herself, trying to drown her own troubles in the thought of another's. She might be of some comfort, at that sad time when strange hands took away her dead out of her sight.

She walked slower and tried to calm herself. The half hour struck from the church clock as she put her finger on the latch of the poor door.

It opened. Perhaps Jael had gone out. She turned to the orchard, but there was no movement there. The house, too, was silent.

Jael must be sleeping, then, and Priscilla, and the child.


Daphne's first thought was to let her sleep on. She must be so tired after long nights of watching and grief.

The next was to remember that before long the old man must be laid in his coffin. It would be better for Jael to awake now, than to come to herself only to find her need to watch was over, and the time for the last look come.

"Jael!" said Daphne, softly, at the bottom of the ladder. Perhaps she need not face them all, after all; Jael was such a light sleeper; she would hear her call.

"Jael!" she said, the second time, less softly.

There was no sound, though she strained



her ear to catch it. Not even a movement from Priscilla or the child.

If *they* were sleeping soundly, she could go up and wake Jael, without awaking them.

She began climbing the ladder carefully, groping her way for a safe footing on the dark landing.

"Jael!" she said again, in the doorway, pausing as she looked into the room.

Jael's bed was empty. 'Scilla was not there.

Daphne gave a deep sigh of relief, seeing it.

Then she felt a chill steal over her. For there lay Jael sleeping beside the dead man; all night she must have been alone with *that*.

There was something thrilling and awful in the silence in the little garret; in Jael's motionless child-like sleep beside the shrouded figure.

How brave she was, said Daphne, coming nearer to her ; what a brave, true soul.

“ Jael ! ” she said, the fourth time ; and as she said it, and there came no answer, she stretched out her hand to touch the sleeper’s shoulder.

One touch, and Daphne withdrew her hand, while the chill that had stolen over her by reason of the silence, seemed to spread over her whole frame, and freeze her blood.

This was not sleep : or if it be sleep, it is so different from that “ taking of rest in sleep ” that we know nightly, that we have called it by another name.

Jael Thorne was dead.

The short, turbulent day of life was over ; and her rest had begun.

Her work, too, was over : she lived to keep the last watch beside him, dead, whom, living, she had so long watched over. Now

strangers must take him, and what had she to do ?

What but follow him, and follow closely?

He had entered the great door which opens so often to let men in, but never to send men out again.

There is one key to that door, and only one. God offered it to Jael Thorne, and she saw that the name of it was death.

And she stretched out her hand, and said "Amen, Lord !" And so the door opened.



CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LANE THAT HAD A TURNING.



APHNE LYNN never knew how it was that she got out of the room, and down the ladder, without falling.

She had felt ill in the morning when she started. This last shock seemed to rob her of all her remaining strength. She found herself dizzy and faint, in the green lane, trying to make her way back to the village.

After a few steps, a blackness came over her sight. She tried to get to a gate near her ; but the darkness thickened, and the

gate vanished from her. She tried no longer to save herself, but fell heavily to the ground.

It is one of the many merciful provisions for our feeble human nature, that, when suffering, either of body or mind, reaches its highest point, then blessed unconsciousness overtakes us. There is a truce from pain, before we are called upon again to take up our burden. Pain's very intensity brings its own relief.

How long Miss Lynn might have lain there it is difficult to say, for it was a lonely place—the loneliest in Shelbourne.

But, this morning, the men who were carrying Josiah Thorne's coffin came up the lane, and with them came Jonathan.

He was walking with them, for he had a way of making friends with men of all trades, and picking up what he could from them. Perhaps that was the secret of his being able to turn his hand to most things.

But the two men in front were the first to catch sight of a woman's figure stretched upon the ground.


"It must be Jael," said Jonathan, remembering her seizure the day of the school-feast in Mr. May's field.

He ran forward. The first glance showed him it was not Jael.

Daphne's straw hat had fallen from her head and lay beside her. She lay with her face beneath the hedge, where the moss sloped up to it. It was the most death-like face Jonathan had ever seen in a living being. Was she living? He could hardly think so—so deathly cold her hands were, and her lips so livid.

Jonathan's mother had given him a little brandy in a small medicine-bottle.

"Jael 'll want something, poor soul," she had said, as she slipped it into his pocket; "and she's not like to have nothin' by her; not so much as a dust o' tea."



He forced open the closed lips, and, raising her head on his knee, he poured it down her throat.

“She’s so deadly cold,” he said to the men, who had laid down the coffin, and were standing staring, and doing nothing. “Take that on to the house, will you, and get a blanket or a shawl.”

“Here’s this,” said one of the men, throwing something at Jonathan’s feet, as he turned away.

It was the parish pall: a rusty, thin, black velvet pall, with a wide white border.

Jonathan put out his hand to take it.

“Not that, for the love of God,” he said, under his breath; and he pushed it from him with his foot, while he took his own coat off, and wrapped it round her.

Still there was no movement in the head resting upon Jonathan’s knee.

Perhaps she was really dead. It seemed so long since he had found her! and how


long before he had found her might she not have been lying there ?

Till now he had quite forgotten himself. In the wish to save a life he had almost forgotten whose life he wished to save.

Now that the thought came to him that the life was passed beyond his power to recall it, he knew it was Daphne Lynn that lay dead at his feet.

And the first feeling was one—not of sick despair, but—of a strange triumph. Living, she was dead to him ; now she was his for one short moment. Aaron Falk had not found her, and tried to save her. God had taken her from them both, but to him, Jonathan, it had been given to know it first, to hold her while her spirit passed away into God's presence.

He laid her down upon the grass again, his coat folded round her. And now he knelt beside her, and said words to her that he had never said to Daphne living.



Every now and then he chafed her white hands as a last hope. But then he laid them down again reverently on her breast. She had never meant that hand to be his ; it seemed to him a mean thing to take advantage of her now : only, he said, she could not hear him. .

“ You thought he loved you, and he must love you. God made you so that we must all love you. But his love was never like mine—he never could have made you as happy as I could. I’m poor and he’s rich ; I was below you, and he was above you ; but I know you couldn’t be happy with him, that’s why God has taken you : I thought, somehow, it could never be—I thought it never could be right that the Almighty should let it be.”

There was a slight movement, first in the hands ; then the lips parted ; at last the eyes opened.

Jonathan had risen to his feet, and was

standing a little on one side. It would be a shock to her to come to herself and find him so close to her ; his face would not be the face she would look for and hope to find.


Ah, yes ! it was a shock, even now, and Daphne was straining her eyes to see him. Consciousness was only slowly coming to her. She had a perplexed wistful look on her face, she wanted to see clearly, and could not.

Catching sight at last of the outline of a man's figure, she gave a cry. It seemed to Jonathan to be a cry of terror.

It gave him a sharp pain at his heart. He knew she would not care to see him ; but he had not thought that the sight of him would have been terrible to her. What had he done to deserve this ?

At any rate she was frightened, and he must try to soothe her.

"Don't be afraid," he said, coming for-



ward, and looking into her still half-vacant eyes; "it's only Jonathan the blacksmith. I found you fainting, and I tried to bring you to."

The eyes were not vacant any longer; they were turned upon Jonathan. The knitted brows relaxed; even a smile came to Miss Lynn's lips.

"Oh!" she said, drawing a deep breath, "it's you; I didn't think of that; I thought, I was afraid——"

She stopped, and tried to raise herself.

"If you'd not mind taking my arm," said Jonathan, "I could help you to Jael's house. It's close by; I suppose you were going there?"

Miss Lynn was looking round, bewildered, as if the lane and hedges and the clear sky could help her to remember where she was, and what had happened.

At the mention of Jael's name she remembered everything.

“Not going,” she said, “I was coming back. I went up to see her, and she was—oh, Jonathan, she was dead!”


She burst into a flood of tears; Jonathan’s arm shook under her hand.

He had never heard his name from her lips before. Trouble had broken down the barrier between them.

They walked on in silence a little, towards the cottage. Then Miss Lynn said—

“You must wonder at me for being so weak as to cry like this. I wonder at myself, because I know we must all die; I do not think death is so very awful. But I was not well when I came out; I felt very ill and tired. I’ve had trouble of my own, and Jael’s came at the same time as mine; and then finding her dead—it seemed the last straw, and I couldn’t bear it any longer.”

Jonathan did not answer. He was wondering what her trouble could be. All the



people thought she had no trouble, that all things prospered with her. He had thought so too.

"Our lots lie far apart," he said, after a while. "It isn't likely I can help you in anything; but if I can, you know you've only to ask me. After this next ten days, I don't say I can, because if you're above me now, you'll be higher above me then, and what's more—"

"Don't speak of that!" she cried, stopping his words; "that is never to be."

Jonathan was thunder-struck. Had Aaron Falk given her up? Was it possible?

There was such infinite distress in her eyes, that he asked, in spite of himself, and with a touch of satire he was hardly conscious of—

"Is that your trouble—that it's never to be?"

"It's trouble every way," she answered,

“but that it should ever be, now, would be the worst trouble of all.”

They had come to the door of the cottage. Miss Lynn shivered as she saw that they had done so.


“That house!” Jonathan heard her say to herself, under her breath.

“Don’t come in again,” he said, “there’s no call for you to come in.” His voice was trembling. He pointed to a broken stump by the wall, where she could rest, and ran into the house to get away from his own tumultuous thoughts.

Had the sin found out Aaron Falk, after all? Was God going to do justly, by man’s ideas of justice?

“We couldn’t get no blanket,” said one of the men coming to meet him. “There’s nothing in the house but the clothes they lies in. I suppose the woman, she’s asleep.”

Jonathan went up to the garret. Perhaps Daphne had been mistaken.



But Daphne had been right.

Before another night another coffin came
up the green lane ; and one grave received
Jael and Josiah.



CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BREWER'S RETURN.



ARON FALK had come home very late, after his long day of business.

It was eleven o'clock as he drove through the village, past the school-house gate. Too late to go and see Daphne that night ; the only light that burnt was from her bedroom window.

But he was in a happy state of mind for all that ; happiness was so near to him now, it coloured his life already with its rosy glow.

Good wishes and congratulations had met him on all sides during the day. Many of his friends had heard of Miss Lynn, of her beautiful voice when she led the choir, of the change in Shelbourne since she had come there. They did not fail to tell him so, and hearing it all made him proud as well as happy. He loved Daphne so well that the opinion of others would never have turned him from his choice; but that his choice should be approved, was very pleasant to him. He shrank from public censure, and valued highly, if he did not court, public praise.

As he pulled off his great-coat inside his own door, he felt in the pocket for a little parcel he had brought with him.

The lights were burning in the dining-room, where Sarah had prepared his supper. She had lighted a fire, because it was a chilly evening, and the warmth and brightness were in tune with his happy thoughts.

He went up to the table, undoing the silver paper round his little parcel.

First, a something flat and small. He laid it down very carefully on the table, then opened the paper and its contents. It was a wedding ring, small and bright, that lay shining under the lamp-light.

He lifted up the little paper by the corners, as carefully as he had laid it down, and looked at it closely. A quiet smile came over his face. The pinched, calculating, hard look was gone ; love and happiness had worked wonders there.

Then he laid the paper and the ring down again, and opened a tiny box. He took out of it a locket which he held up by the ring to the lamp-light. He was not used to handling such things, and he touched it gingerly, as if it would break. There was a lock of dark hair in the locket, when he opened it. He looked at the hair a moment, as if he thought that that should be in a locket

that Daphne was to wear pleased him greatly.

When he heard Sarah's step, he closed it with a click, and took both ring and locket to the mantelpiece, where she could not see them. Two letters were lying on it ; one was unstamped, and the writing was Daphne Lynn's.

Why did she write, when she could send for him ? Why had he not stopped to see if she wanted anything, as he passed the gate ? It was an unusual thing for her to write to him. Perhaps Mrs. Lynn was ill ; perhaps—he fancied the writing was hardly so firm as usual—perhaps Daphne herself was ill.

He opened the envelope hastily.

Sarah had left the room, shutting the door behind her.

There was perfect stillness while he read. Only the newly-lit fire crackled cheerfully at his feet.

And he made no movement. He read to the end, folded the letter, put it back in the envelope, and laid it down before him.

But the thin face he raised to the ceiling was blanched to a strong whiteness. The fresh night-wind had sent him in with a ruddy colour in his cheeks. Now the ghost of the man that had entered the room a few moments before stood in his place.

Sarah's step was at the doorway once more.

He turned away to the fire again, and took up the paper.

"You can go to bed," he said, "I want nothing more to-night."

He sat down, and began mechanically carving the cold mutton on the table.

But he stopped after the first slice had been cut, and laid down the knife and fork on either side.

He put his hand up over his eyes, leaning his elbow on the table.

So he remained, far on into the night—that night that seemed to be ruled over by the evil influence of some star that sat high in the windy September sky, and looked down on Shelbourne.

He had been stunned at first by the awful suddenness of the blow. Even thought was impossible.

Now, as he sat on, and the hours clanged out in the silence from the steeple, he came to himself; and asked himself what he should do?

Do? what was there to do? Doing was of as little avail as thinking. Once before, in terrible trouble, he had roused himself to act, and he had acted.

But what had the act done for him? It had averted the blow that had fallen at last.


If it had taken place then, it would have been less hard a blow. Then he had never known or loved a Daphne. The respect of

his neighbours had been hard to lose ; what was it to lose this woman's love, after he had earned it—just as the cup of happiness was at his lips ?

What could he do ? With her nothing could be done ; that was all over. Fear of him, suspicion of him, he might have overcome ; but she had learnt a terrible truth ; it was the strength of that, that stunned him. With her there could be no buying over, no deceiving. She was true, and he loved her : there could be no crooked dealings with her.

He did not wonder *how* the truth had come to her ; how, after all, the sin had found him out. That it had come to her, that he had lost her, and through his own sin, that was the sting of his sorrow.

Through Jonathan or through Jael, what did it matter, so long as he had lost her ? How could it signify by whose hand he had



fallen, so long as he *had* fallen in her sight? Now that she had passed away from him, and he knew that they were as irrevocably parted as if death divided them—nay, perhaps much more—the beauty and innocence of her character stood out more clearly before him. In proportion as he had fallen low before her, so she towered above him. They could have nothing in common. She could have no pity for him: repentance could be but an idle word in her ears; for how could repentance undo the past, and make him the man she had believed in?

With her nothing could be done, and little said. His shame would have driven him away without seeing her, and so he could have spared her pain.

But his love for her, and the self-respect that still remained to him, told him he must see her once again.

To part with her with no parting was im-


possible. Her forgiveness he must gain, if he could : for he knew by the letter before him what she had suffered—what he had caused her to suffer.

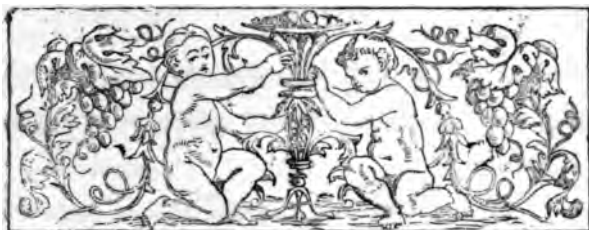
He rose from his untasted supper, and took the little box in his hands. Then he pushed open the window, and walked down the green slope of his garden, to the pond below.

There was a little splash, not enough to startle the swan asleep on the water, with his head under his wing. One or two small circles, that the moon lighted up as a cloud, passed by her.

Aaron Falk came back. The little plain gold ring lay still upon the mantelpiece in its silver-paper.

He had measured her finger for it. It only went upon the tip of his own. There was nothing that savoured of him in it, as there had been in the locket. He could not throw it away yet. That might come, by-and-by : but not yet.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GATES OF DEATH.



WHEN Jonathan came out of the Thornes' cottage, Miss Lynn had gone.

He saw the men out of the house, and, locking the door, put the key in his pocket. There was no need for watchers any longer there.

The men, who had come from a neighbouring village, left him at the foot of the lane.

He turned into the meadow to make his way homewards, and on the top he paused

and looked round, thinking he might catch sight of Daphne's figure going down the slope.


"She isn't fit to go home alone," he said to himself. "She might have waited."

He had been looking on at some distance, while she was close to him. She was sitting with her back against one of the large elms that crowned the slope, resting her head against it. She got up when Jonathan came in sight.

"I'm glad you waited," he said, coming up to her. "You aren't fit to walk alone."

"I thought I was," she answered, "I felt better when I started, and I thought I should like to get home. But I'd better tell you the truth. I was afraid to go through the field alone, and I waited for you."

Jonathan thought he understood what she meant—that she feared meeting Falk: but he said nothing. It would be better



to let her speak on. It was not for him to intrude on her trouble.

They walked on without speaking for a little. Then Daphne said suddenly, as if she were forcing the words to come,

“I have been thinking since I sat here what I must do. And it has come to me that I had better speak to you. I believe I can trust you better than most people here, and I think you are better able to answer me than some. Will you tell me the whole truth if I ask you?”

“I never can tell you anything but the truth,” he answered. “But it’s not in a man’s power always to tell the whole truth. Some things a man must keep unsaid, all his life through.”

She saw no hidden meaning in his words and went on, speaking with agitation,

“I shall know by your face whether it is true—whether you know more than I do. I don’t think you can look a lie, far

less say one. You know that I was going to be married—and I've told you to-day it can never be. I've told him so, and I have given him up. And O God, it's a hard thing to ask a stranger—but if you were my brother or my father, would you say I was right? You knew the Thornes well—do you know their history better than the other village people? Did Jael's words mean what I took them to mean? If you had a sister, would you like her to marry *him*?"

She was looking earnestly into his face for the answer.

Jonathan turned to her and said, as earnestly,

"If I had a sister, God knows I couldn't be more glad to save her from him than to hear that He's put out His hand and saved you."

The tears rushed into Daphne's eyes.

They had stopped, and were looking at each other.

“And no one warned me. I knew I had few friends,” she said, “since my father died. But I did not think I had no friend. It’s not a world where women can live alone, and trust to those who know more of it and its sins, to keep them out of misery. But what could I expect, in a strange, strange place, where no one cares for us?”

Jonathan had turned his shoulder to her. He was looking away over the fields and past the village. For a moment he was choked, and could not speak. Daphne’s sad face and hard saying had moved him almost beyond the power of self-control.

After a few moments he turned, and said, in a voice that silenced her, she knew not why—

“It’s not as you think. It’s as far from it as night and day. I can’t tell you now

why I've kept silence. Perhaps, some day my tongue may be loosed. But it's a hard tongue to loose at all times, and of late there's been nothing to say, that could be said. Only it isn't that you've got no friend in Shelbourne—for the love of God don't say that again."

They did not speak again till they reached the school-gate.

"Mr. Cleare," said Daphne, then, "there is only one thing I want to ask you—are you the only man who knows what I know? or does all the world speak evil of him?"

Jonathan looked at her for the first time in his life with suspicion. Did public opinion weigh then so much with her? Would she determine her choice by the fact of whether Falk was, in the eyes of others, innocent or guilty?

He determined that his answer should test her. With a certain bitterness, he said—

"Only one man in Shelbourne knows it besides me. He won't speak if it's of service to you that he should keep silence. He's been silent for the sake of Jael, who'd have lost her home if he'd spoken. We're broken in to it now, and if *you* want the man to be screened—it can be just as it has been—all, just as it has been."

"I *do* want him to be screened," she answered. "He has trouble enough without bringing reproach on him, from which he can be saved. Let it be between us three and my mother for ever. It's the only thing I can do for him, now that all is over between us."

"The other man has a greater temptation to speak than I have now," said Jonathan, "whatever it may have been till to-day. But he's my mate, and I think I can rule him, since he's ruled himself so well till now."

Daphne held out her hand to Jonathan


and turned away. She knew he must be speaking of Andrew Male. But what use to ask further questions ? The one she had asked was answered. The promise she had wished for was given.

She blessed Jonathan in her heart for this. And the first words she said to her mother were not of her own weakness, or the shock she had met with in finding Jael dead ; but—

“ It need not be known, mother. No one need know the reason that it is all over.”

“ My dear,” said the mother, “ it would be better surely that they should know. What will they think of you for breaking it off, if you can’t give a reason ? They’ll say you’ve jilted him, that’s all.”

“ What *can* it matter ?” she answered, bursting into an hysterical fit of crying. “ I want to get to bed—help me, mother, to get to bed.”



At seven o'clock next morning, when Jonathan was at his bricks and mortar, building the little room on to his house, which was his work now in his spare hours, he heard the sound of quick wheels up the road.

He and a neighbour from the next house looked out at the same time.

"It's the doctor," said the neighbour. "I take it the schoolmissus is ill. She did look bad yesterday and the day before."

Daphne was indeed ill. She had passed away again into the land of unconsciousness, in which Jonathan had found her the day before.

When Aaron Falk came to see her the first time, he was told that she was ill. The second time he came, Mrs. Lynn had the doctor's orders to admit no one.

"If I could see her—even see her," he said, "for the last time. I should never

trouble her or you again, if I could see her once."


"Does she know any one?" Mrs. Lynn asked of Mrs. Cleare, who had come in till a nurse could be sent for.

Mrs. Cleare shook her head.

"You can come, then, and look into the room," said Mrs. Lynn. All her feverishness was gone. She was calm and ready for all emergencies, now that real trouble had overtaken her.

Aaron Falk followed her upstairs. The window in Daphne's room was open. The muslin blind was softly blowing out and in on the wind. A bunch of late roses that he had sent her stood in a glass on the table, hanging their heavy heads over her Bible and her work.

Mrs. Lynn held the door open, and he took one look. Daphne's grey eyes were fixed vacantly on the ceiling, and her hands were thrown out over the pillow.



“My God!” said Aaron Falk, turning away, “and it is my doing!”

He went downstairs and out of the house, leaving the blind woman before she had time to say the words of forgiveness that were on her lips.

There was no change in Miss Lynn's condition for many days. After that she grew worse. And no nurse, such as Mrs. Lynn could afford to pay for, was to be found.

“Mother, couldn't you say you'd go on doing for her?” said Jonathan, one day. “Surely you'd do better for her than a stranger; I'd see after father if you'd go.”

“Jonathan, he's al'ays so thoughtful,” said Mrs. Cleare to Daphne's mother. “He says as I can stop and do for her if you're willin', ma'am. He's ta'en it wonderful to heart that she's so bad. He's like his father some ways, is Jonathan. He don't say much, but he'll go out over the door if anythin' upsets him like. He went out

to-mornin' soon's ever he heard as she were worse, and then he come and begged me to do for her. 'Mother,' says he, 'you can do better for her,' says he, 'than a stranger.' "

Mrs. Lynn was quite of Jonathan's opinion. She could do little herself because of her blindness. But Daphne was a very quiet sufferer, and gave little or no trouble ; and she seemed to be as patient as a lamb in Mrs. Cleare's hands.

"Whether she lives or whether she dies, she's ready to go," said Jonathan's mother, one evening when she returned home to get her men's supper ready, before going back for the night to the schoolhouse.

"Do she look like sinkin'?" asked Jonathan the elder, wakened to an unusual interest in other people's concerns.

"No one can't tell yet," said his wife ; "but this is the worst day as she's had all along. She's so roamin,' and don't get no

sleep. The doctor said he'd come agin to-night and pass his opinion on her. He said he'd see to-night which way it 'ud turn. Jonathan, you ain't eatin' no victuals ; can't you so much as take your beer ?”



CHAPTER XXIX.

SILVER LINING.



O one but Andrew guessed at the reason why Priscilla had left her mother and gone back to Hepreth.

And he guessed rightly.

The sight of her grandfather in death had awed and frightened her; the thought of a night spent in the same room and house with that still figure terrified her.

Towards evening, though it was damp and chilly, and the child ailing, her fear overmastered her, and she fled back to the workhouse.

"Why did you come back so soon?" asked one of the women, as she came in wet and tired. "If I'd the chance of gettin' home, or a home to go to, I wouldn't hurry to get back in this hole agin."

"I thought as something 'ud come to the child if I stopped along o' *that*," said 'Scilla; "gran'father were dead. They're goin' to put him away to-morrow. I couldn't stop there." And she shivered.

"Somethin' more like to come to the child through bringin' him home this damp night and him ailin'," said the nurse, taking the little thing out of 'Scilla's arms, and feeling its cold hands and feet, almost as blue as the frock it was dressed in.

Priscilla looked up frightened, into the nurse's face.

"You don't think nothin' 'll come to him, do you?" she asked, tremulously.


"It's not your fault if it don't. But there, there, now—don't be a silly and cry about

it. Cryin' never mended broken bones, as the sayin' is. Get some hot water, and we'll bath him. Bring it to my ward, there's a fire there."

They were standing in a bare room, where four or five other women with babies in their arms were sitting on a bench against the wall. The only relief in the expanse of deal and whitewash was a placard, addressed in large black letters to "Refractory Paupers," which hung upon the wall.

'Scilla thankfully followed the nurse, a kind woman who had had children of her own, to the sick-ward, where flowers and a fire made the place a paradise in the poor girl's eyes.

"There, he's better for that ; no doctor couldn't do no better for him," said one of the women who was sitting up in bed. The sight of 'Scilla's distress, and of the little child's face, made a grateful source of excite-



ment in the monotonous life of the work-house invalids.

“He can’t go with you to-night,” said the nurse kindly, but with decision, “it’s warmer in here than in your place.”

She had noticed what Priscilla had not, that the little one’s breathing was thick, and that there was a sound of croup.

Priscilla slunk off to bed with heavy steps and a woe-begone face. But she lay on the top of the brown coverlet without undressing, till the under-matron, coming round to see that all was right, discovered her.

“Where are your senses?” she asked roughly. “Lying down in your new dress? If you had to pay for it, you’d take better care. Get up directly, and go to bed in a proper way.”

It was no use to explain why she had not undressed. The story of her child’s


illness would find no soft corner to touch in this woman's heart. Priscilla rose as she was told, and the matron stood beside her till her orders were obeyed.

"Don't put your clothes on the bed; you know very well that's against the rules. I shall have to complain of you to the master."

"It's so cold," said the girl, shivering, looking wistfully at the dress which would have kept her feet warm if she had laid it on them.

"Cold? Don't talk to me about cold; a strong, healthy young woman like you ought never to feel cold. How many blankets do you have at home, I wonder? It can't be much of a home, or you wouldn't have hurried back from it. You know well enough where to be comfortable, though you can whine like the rest of them when you're here."

The matron went out, locking the door



behind her. But Priscilla lay awake. If the child were worse, the nurse would come to the door and tell her.

At six o'clock, when they all got up, the nurse had not been to the door. 'Scilla rose with a lighter heart, and dressed herself quickly.

The doors were open now ; she looked out to see that the passage was clear, and then ran to the sick-ward.

"My dear," said the nurse, coming up to her, "I weren't willin' to trouble you 'cause I knowed you couldn't come out to the mornin', but the child's very bad. You can look at it, but I don't think the Lord 'll spare it to you."

The girl gave a cry and ran across the ward to the bed where her child was lying. She saw death in its face, and with a moan she sank down on a chair beside it, stretched her arms over its body, and put her forehead against its breast. She could

not bear to see it die, and she knew that it was dying.

“Is there any one she knows,” asked the doctor, a few hours later, “if she has no relations? Some one ought to come who could do something with her.”

The nurse shook her head.

“She never speaks of no one, except her mother, and there come a letter to-mornin’ sayin’ she were dead. I read her the letter, but she didn’t make as if she heard it, she’s that taken up with the child.”

“Poor soul,” said the doctor; “she’s in great trouble. I’m half afraid for her reason if she’s not roused. She ought to be taken out of here for a little to get this off her mind. She’s not as wise as most people, I think?”

“Well, I dun’ know about that, sir. She’s wise enough and got heart enough about some things. Wonderful good mother she’s been to that poor child: and as gentle as a lamb. No bad words like the other women.”

“What’s her name?” asked the doctor, laying his hand on the girl’s head. “Priscilla, is it? Well, Priscilla, look here, you must try and rouse yourself. This won’t do; the little child is dead, but you’ve some other friends in the world, I daresay.”

She looked up with a dull stare into his face and made no answer.

“Well, I can’t wait. Only if you can find out that she has any friends, nurse, you must let them know. Let her sleep here to-night; it’ll comfort her, though the child’s dead. Remember, if there’s any trouble made about it, it is by my orders.”

“Let me see,” said the nurse, rubbing her forehead, a little later. “She comes from Shelbourne. There’s a cart of the brewer’s goes past to-day; it always goes o’ Thursdays. I’ll set one of the children to watch for it. It’ll be a nice job for one of ’em, and pass the time; and they’ll take a message to her friends, if she has any.”

* * * * *

Towards evening a young man was standing at the door of the sick-ward.

"Here's a young man who is a friend of the girl Thorne," said the master, who had come to the door. "The doctor wished any one who came to see her to be admitted."

"Come in," said the nurse, kindly. "I'm sure we're glad to see any one as is a friend of hern. We've been all upset like, seein' the trouble she makes of losin' the poor child. Perhaps she'll rouse more if you'll speak to her."

The young man came stepping softly across the room, as softly as he could in his thick-nailed boots. He was in his working clothes, and there was a look of excitement, which he was trying to suppress, upon his sun-burnt face.

'Scilla was still lying with her face upon the dead child, her arms stretched over it.

"It can't be dead," said the young man, looking at the nurse; "she never could abide to see sick folk, let alone a corpse."

"She can abide this," said the nurse; "it's her own, you see; we can't get her to leave it. I wish we could."

"'Scilla," he said, coming close to her, "you ain't left quite alone; you've got a friend yet, 'Scilla. I've come a purpose, as soon's ever I heard the news, to see if I could help you."

She moved a little.

"You won't let me go back without speaking to me, will you, 'Scilla? You remember 'Drew, don't you, 'Scilla, as was always your friend?"

The nurse had turned away. Even the women in the beds had left off staring. Tears were in some of their eyes. Something in Andrew's manner made them feel that to look and listen would be an intrusion. This was no common meeting of two friends.

The girl lifted herself up now, and ran into Andrew's face.

"Give me your hand," he said, in a low voice.

She kept one on the dead child; the other she gave to Andrew. Her eyes had gone back again to the little corpse.

"I knew you'd speak to me, 'Scilla. I comed away soon's ever I heard you was in trouble. I haven't been nigh you before, because—well, for one thing, I thought you hadn't no need of me. But when I heard you'd lost that—I couldn't do other than come to you. You aren't angered because I've come, are you, 'Scilla?"

She looked at him, and the tears had come into her dry eyes. Her lips moved; she was saying No, very softly; so softly that no one but Andrew, who knew her ways so well, could have guessed at what she said.

"My dear," he said, bending over her,

and closing his hands tightly over hers, "it breaks my heart to see you here ; it ain't no place for the like o' you. Do you think as you could come back with me, now as you've got nothin' to care for here ? You ain't got no mother now, nor no home, 'Scilla."

She pointed to the dead child, and whispered,

"I can't leave that."

"But that'll come home, too," he answered ; "you'd like it be laid under the old church, and not in the town ?"

She nodded her assent, for her voice was choked with tears.

"Will you help her get ready ?" said Andrew, turning to the nurse ; "I think I'll get her to come home to my mother."

"That I will, and you'll deal fair by her ? She ain't got no friends, young man."

"She's got friends, and a home now," he answered. And the nurse took his word.


They walked home side by side, Andrew and Priscilla.

It was late on a bright October afternoon, when they started. The hedges were sparkling from the rain of the day before.

The nurse had lent 'Scilla a black shawl and bonnet. The little child was to follow next day, and to be laid to rest in Shelbourne churchyard. The thought of that seemed to comfort 'Scilla ; and as she realised that it was indeed dead—that her mother had gone too, she turned to Andrew with a child-like dependence that she had never shown before.

They spoke very little the first part of the way, only sometimes when she looked tired he gave her his hand. It was better to leave her with her grief a little, Andrew thought.

It was not till they reached the bay in the wood, where the hyacinths grew, that



they used to pick together, that he stopped and said—

“ I want to speak to you now, 'Scilla, my dear.”

“ You aren't going to send me home—not to *that* house ?” she asked, in a frightened tone. Through the copse and up the hill was one of the ways she used to take in old days, to her home.

“ Send you there ? 'Scilla, do you think that's what I brought you for ? Do you think the thought of you isn't in my mind night and day ? They think I've got by it, that I don't care for you no more ; but I'd best tell you the truth, though it may grieve you a bit ; the only thing that stood between you and me, has been taken away to-day. It's the Lord's doings, 'Scilla, that it's taken ; but where the Lord's been hard to you, my darlin', He's been good to me. You didn't want me, before ; but maybe now you'll want a friend ; you'll want

some one to take care on you, 'Scilla ; you know you're made beautiful above other women."

She was hanging her head, but she made no answer. His voice was trembling as he went on—

"This is the place as we used to pick the blue flowers together. I looked in your face many times then, and I said if you'd have me, you should be my wife. Then—you know what came atween us, my dear—and I thought I shouldn't never have a wife."

She was crying now, still looking down.

"Don't fret, 'Scilla, my sweetheart," he said, tenderly ; "it's all past and gone now. You've had your cup of troubles, and—my God !—I've had mine. But I think He's showed us the way as we ought to go, now. It's the way my heart's been pointin' all along. Will you come home to mother,

'Scilla, and be my wife, and be always along of me ?”

“ O 'Drew,” she said, sobbing, “ you're too good to me ; but your mother—she'll never speak to such as me.”

“ Give me a kiss, 'Scilla,” he answered ; “ the Lord's made you mine again, and neither man nor woman shall come between us now.”



CHAPTER XXX.

THE LOVE THAT STOOPED.



O one wondered when the next Sunday morning, Pedley, the clerk, heaved up the large Banns' book, and put it before Mr. May. Every one knew what was coming.

“ I publish the banns of marriage between Andrew Male, bachelor, and Priscilla Thorne, spinster, both of this parish. If any of you know just cause or impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony, ye are

now to declare it. This is the first time of asking."

Some of the people fancied Mr. May's voice shook a little as he spoke. Andrew had always been a favourite of his ; he had felt deeply for him in his trouble. Now, alas, he had good cause for other feelings than sympathy with Andrew. Aaron Falk, the man he had always leaned upon, and taken counsel with, had fallen irrevocably in his eyes. Village rumour began to whisper the truth. The curate, thinking to arm himself and defeat the foul calumny, had gone straight to his friend. And, broken by trouble, by the loss of Daphne's love, and by the news that she was hanging between life and death, the better man in Aaron Falk had asserted itself, and he had opened the black page in his life to Alfred May.

"If I were you, I would go away for a time," the curate had said. "It would

be best on all accounts, if you can leave home."

The brewer did not go at once. Some said he was too proud to be driven away. Others, that he cared more for his money than his good name. Even Mr. May judged hardly of him for staying on in Shelbourne at such a time. No one guessed that he stayed only till he could hear that Daphne's life was safe. While she lay at death's door he felt he was a murderer. He knew that Jael's death alone could never have brought her to this pass.

She did not die but live, and when he heard that she was out of danger, the brewer took Mr. May's advice and went away.

As Miss Lynn lay in that helpless but happy state of a slow and tedious recovery, she felt as if she had passed one long night of sleep, and had awoke to find years gone over her head.

There was no fear of poor Aaron Falk in his distress any longer. He had been gone a week before she could make up her mind to ask her mother about him.

"Mother," she said, when her question had been answered, "I think there is but one thing for us to do, and that is to leave this place as soon as I can get about again. I know people that have to work for their bread can't afford to go always by their feelings. But I don't think he can ever be happy while we are here. If we went away, it would all pass over, and be as if it had never been, I dare say. It is his home, and it's not ours. We were breaking up our home anyhow. It would be very easy for us to go."

"If you wish it, my dear, perhaps it may be," her mother answered, trying to quiet her for the present at all costs. "You can talk to the minister when you're better."

"There's another thing," said Daphne, "the school is closed all this time. I know Mr. May does not like to look for another mistress while things are as they are. He would think it was taking the bread out of our mouths. I wish you'd write and give it up for me, mother. I should feel much happier if you would."

"Should you, my dear? Well, then, I'm willing to try and go away. But it's a hard thing to move again at my age, Daphne."

"But you don't care to stop, do you, mother? There is no one cares for us here. Everything that made Shelbourne a happy place to us is gone. I feel as if I must go away from it all, and forget all that has happened. I feel so old, mother, I feel as if years had passed since I lay down on this bed."

Mrs. Lynn went down to the kitchen to have her tea with Mrs. Cleare. She told

her almost word for word what Daphne had said.

“I’ll take her a cup o’ tea,” said Jonathan’s mother, with the tears in her sweet grey eyes.

“My dear,” she said, “your mother’s been a-tellin’ me as you’ve been sayin’ you’ve got no friends—no one as cares whether you go or stays. And I take it hard as you’d go to think that, when so many’s ta’en up with you. There’s never a day but Jonathan’s awaitin’ in the door of a evenin’, a purpose to hear if you’re mendin’.”

Daphne was looking in Mrs. Cleare’s face when she began to speak. Before she ended she had turned her eyes away.

After a little she said, as Mrs. Cleare sat beside her,

“Andrew Male is his friend, isn’t he?”

“Yes. He’s his mate; they’ve been mates ever sin’ they were lads together.

They're wonderful arter each other, is Jonathan and 'Drew."

"When did you say the marriage was to be?"

"Oh, 'Drew, he's to be married to-morrow. He were asked the last time o' Sunday. It's put new life in Jonathan seein' his mate happy. He's been terrible cast down o' late, wi' one thing and another."

The next morning, a little past eight o'clock, Jonathan and Andrew walked down to the church together.

Andrew's quiet face was lit up with a subdued happiness that his mate had missed for many a long day back.

No one else was at the church but Andrew's mother, who brought 'Scilla.

"Jonathan," said Andrew, as they came to the churchyard gate, "I never thought this day 'ud come arter all. But it's come, and mother's ta'en it a deal better than I

thought—no one can't help to love 'Scilla as gets to know her. But I al'ays knowed the one of us as went first to the church, to marryin' or to buryin', he wouldn't go alone. We've stuck together all along, and I hope nothin' won't ever come atween us."

"It's not very like, 'Drew," said Jonathan.

"I dun' know, lad, about that. Look here," and he stopped an instant, and took his mate by the arm, "there'll never be another day as happy as this in my life, till I see you and the girl you love standin' as me and my 'Scilla's goin' to do this mornin'."

"Don't wait for that day, 'Drew, it'll never come."

"It may or it mayn't," said 'Drew, knowing it was little use to argue with Jonathan. "But what I wanted to say is this. I'm afraid if ever the woman you love says she loves you, that day you'll have to give up your mate. Leastways it can't be as it was in old days—as it is now."

“What do you mean?” said Jonathan.

“I mean one as is as she is, won’t look at my ’Scilla. Women is terrible hard on each other, Jonathan. I’ve found that before now. And she’d have cause, I know that. But for all that——”

“For all that—what, ’Drew?”

“I couldn’t come nigh them as wouldn’t speak to her. Not if it was your wife, Jonathan.”

Just then they went into the church, and there was no need to answer.

To hear Andrew speak, he might have seemed a proud man that day.

Yet, at his wish, he married his wife in her black gown and bonnet. And no bells rang out a wedding peal from the steeple.

They walked home together, the little company of four. But Jonathan and Martha followed this time, and Andrew and ’Scilla went before.



CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LOVE THAT SOARED.

“**T**’S a hard thing to move again
at my age, Daphne.”

That was quite enough to rouse Miss Lynn from the depression which followed upon her illness, and to make her return to the old life, without further thought of change.

Her recovery was very slow, but the squire, at Mr. May’s intercession, had her place filled for some weeks. The doctor had ordered change, but neither the weather nor the schoolmistress’s purse made it

possible. In her own heart she longed to leave Shelbourne. It was full of sad associations ; not only sad, she said, for sadness might be hallowed ; but all her memories were bitter.

As soon as she was at all fit for it, she turned to her teaching as the least evil. The lack of her natural occupation gave her too much time for thought. She had gone again and again through that painful task of self-analysis, which to a tender conscience is nothing short of misery. At times her sorrow and horror of Aaron Falk's sin seemed to fade before her distress at the remembrance of what she thought her own wilful self-deception.

For perhaps her keenest suffering now came from the knowledge that his loss was not a heart-breaking loss to her. She was conscious of a feeling of relief when she awoke morning after morning to remember she was free.

And yet she had deceived herself into thinking she cared for him ; or, not caring for him, she had promised to marry him, and so had deceived him, too. For what must any man think of a woman and a promise such as she had given, if he did not take it to mean something like love ?

And then, again, she lifted up her face and thanked God for saving her, all unworthy as she was, from herself, and from the rash and wicked step she had taken. He had taken her by a hard way, through deep waters ; but it seemed to her that the blow He had dealt to her chains was the only blow that could have severed them and forced her into freedom.

In her work she found some relief ; but she was a humbler woman than before. She felt she had conned a lesson of distrust in herself and her own motives that never could be unlearned.

And Jonathan ? Jonathan watched her

still from afar off. The barriers that stood between them seemed to him still so great, that the dismissal of Aaron Falk lessened the distance very little. Then she was changed, it is true. When she was at the point of death, only the dark figure of that destroyer was his rival. If she might only live, then all would be well.

But when the misery of suspense had passed, their paths sundered. He saw her the pale ghost of the Daphne he remembered, but with an inexpressible sweetness and sadness come into her face that awed him. He saw her clothed in a calm, dignified, sorrowful reserve, that seemed to bid him to stand aloof from her. She was the schoolmistress again, well dressed, with gentle womanly manners, such as the people he lived amongst thought only fit for ladies. And he was the blacksmith, with an old father and mother to support, and only the trade of a little village to rely on.


The people he lived amongst could not be those with whom she could be happy ; though once with a bound his heart had leaped within him when he saw Daphne kiss his mother at the schoolhouse door.

So he let the weeks and months go by, and did not know whether he was happy or unhappy. Only a warmth came over him when he felt that neither death nor another man had taken her ; that he still saw her pass the forge, still spoke to her sometimes, as strangers speak in passing ; and many times a chill, when he remembered that something wider than the village road divided them, and that it did not lie with him to lessen the gulf. Then it was that he realised what he had given up when he came back to Shelbourne. If things could have gone on with him as they had begun, if he had come home and seen this face that he had got to love so well, he might have asked her to be his wife, and done her

no dishonour. Nay, he would have taken her need to work from her, and she should have lived in plenty, such as she had never known.

June came round again, and Daphne's roses were in bloom once more. She had tended them very carefully through the spring, and day by day they opened their glories to the sun, and to her face as she bent over them. She spent most of her spare time amongst them, but one evening she remembered some white orchises that she had seen growing in a copse by the side of the Hepreth Road, and she put on her hat and went out to look for them, leaving her mother knitting in the garden.

Aaron Falk had not come back. Rumour said he had gone a voyage to America, for his health ; and he had a brother there, so rumour may have said true. But the meadow, and many of Daphne's old haunts were closed to her, by the ghosts of memory.



The Hepreth road was almost new to her, and the copses by the side had taken her fancy.

She had found her orchises, and was just coming out to the road again, when Jonathan Cleare came by ; he, too, was going homewards.

Daphne stood still at the gate leading out of the wood.

“ Good-evening,” said Jonathan, stopping too.

“ Good-evening,” said Daphne, a little colour coming into her face.

The evening sun was slanting down through the limes on the other side of the road ; half her figure was in shadow, half lighted up by the glow. The tall white orchises were nodding in her hand ; her face had an expression of child-like contentment at having succeeded in her quest.

It reminded Jonathan of 'Scilla, as he had often seen her in that wood on summer

evenings ; but oh, the difference between them ! In his eyes Daphne had all 'Scilla's beauty, with that mysterious something in her face besides, without which beauty cannot be a joy for ever.

"I have not seen you to tell you how beautiful my roses are," she said ; "I have no need to come out to get flowers, now ; but I remembered these here last year, and I wanted some."

"Do you want any more?" said Jonathan, laying down his wallet. He went into the copse, without waiting for her answer, and picked two or three. They grew far apart, and it took him some moments to gather them.

"I think I ought to be getting home," said Miss Lynn, who saw that the shadows were lengthening, and remembered that her mother might sit in the garden till she came back.

She took the flowers out of Jonathan's



hand, and thanking him, moved on a step or two.

"Do you mind my walking with you?" he asked, colouring. "If you'd rather go alone, you've only got to say it."

"Of course I don't mind," she said, an answering flush coming into her cheeks. Why should she let him think she cared whether he walked with her or not?

They started together, and both were silent. Only her light tread and his heavy one beat time together. Jonathan's heart was full. Her words had stung him.

"I know you don't care," he said. "I never thought you did. What can it matter to you whether I——"

She had looked up at him with anxious, wondering eyes. She met his, full of a half-fierce, half-sorrowful eagerness that told her more than any words could say.

Did he care what she thought of him? She thought he had never cared. Was it

possible then that this man loved her? Other men's love she had taken quietly, as a matter of course; for were not men loving and women loving all the world over?

But that Jonathan should love her—it made her heart beat. It beat louder, thinking, perhaps, she was mistaken; that he would say nothing more, but begin talking of common things, as he had always done before.

Perhaps Jonathan saw some new light in her eyes as these thoughts passed through her mind. And yet he did not speak. He was looking at her, hanging upon her next word. It was madness, this that he was on the verge of doing; and yet if she said one kind word, gave him one kinder look, he knew nothing could prevent his speaking. His heart was beating with some strange trouble, that was not all trouble. He saw her lips moving, and bent his head. He need not have stooped. Daphne never spoke in whispers when she was moved.

Her voice was very soft and clear as she said :
“ I never thought you cared. And why should I ? ”

“ Cared ! ” he said, “ you never thought I cared ? Oh, for God’s sake then, will you let me speak out now ? ”

She did not answer, but he saw that the orchises shook a little in her hand. And he went on, trying to calm himself, and to steady his voice.

“ I’ve loved you—I can’t say how long I’ve loved you. I’d best tell you that at once, and that I love you now. And if you’re angered, you can send me away before I go on speaking.—I’ve loved you though I knew you were above me—though I’m only a poor working man, without learning, and——”

“ O Jonathan ! ” she broke in, looking up at him with a distressed face.

“ Don’t you want to hear it ? ” he answered. “ My God, how pale you are !

I've been a fool after all, and I thought I could keep silence altogether—but till now heaven and earth have stood between us, and though you hate me, I'll be better for speaking out."

"Jonathan," said Daphne, "I think it was only earth stood between us."

His lips were apart, and a glory of hope was coming over his face.

"Tell me what you mean—I'm so dull—what about 'only earth'?"


"I mean—I believe God meant us for each other."

"But do you mean it?" he cried, standing still before her, to bar her way.

She looked up at him, still quite pale, but with a smile, and said firmly,

"Yes, Jonathan, I do mean it. I didn't know till you asked me. But now I see I've known it all along."

Perhaps they were the most silent lovers that ever plighted troth. But to both of



them their bliss was so unexpected and strange that words seemed but poor things.

Jonathan looked up into the June sky, and back into the copses, and on to the village, and then at Daphne walking by his side. Was it all true? Did she really love him? Had she promised to be his wife?

The sight of the houses and the village loungers brought them to themselves.

"I should have asked you to go on alone," said Daphne, smiling, "if you had been only Jonathan Cleare and I the schoolmistress. But as it is, I think we can walk into the village together, Jonathan."

They went in at the school-house gate, and found Mrs. Lynn had left the garden.

"I think I had better tell her first," said Daphne, "before you come in. Come again to-morrow instead."

"Give me a rose, then," he answered, "something that I can look at, and feel it is all true."

They went in at the little gate together.

"They'll be yours after all, Jonathan," she said. "We'll both go on working—you at your forge and I with the teaching. And then mother can go on in the old home with us just as before."

He had taken the rose from her, and with it her hand. He was looking at her wistfully, trying to say something.

"Daphne," he said, "I don't like to ask you for what I want. It's all so strange to me. God has been so good, I can't believe it. And you're still so much above me," he went on, looking at his working coat and the wallet on his shoulder—"I haven't the face to ask you for it yet. But to-morrow—if it's true you're going to be a poor man's wife—will you give me a kiss?"

"You'll have put your best coat on then," she answered, smiling. "I would rather give it to you now, if it's the same to you, Jonathan."

* * * *



“ I’ve got something more to ask you,” said Jonathan next day to Daphne. “ You know Andrew’s my mate ; would it go against you to come and see him—and ’Scilla ?”


“ I will come with you now,” she answered in a subdued voice.

“ ’Drew thinks you’ll spurn her,” he said, as they went down the village to the Males’ house. “ He’s always been my mate, Daphne, and it’s the only thing that could vex me now if you felt you couldn’t put up with him and poor ’Scilla.”

He was looking at her, waiting for an answer, but there came none. Even he did not know the struggle that was going on within her.

Jonathan went in, while she waited outside. “ ’Drew,” he said, “ Daphne wants to see your wife. She’s waiting in the doorway.”

“ Won’t she come in ?” said ’Drew, get-



ting up, with a pleased smile upon his face.

“Let them be alone first,” said Jonathan.

Scilla rose from her seat in the window, where she sat sewing under the shade of Martha’s big geranium, and looked at Andrew.

“Don’t be afeard,” he said to her, gently, “she’s come a purpose to see you.”

“My dear,” said Daphne, holding out her hands, “we must be friends because Jonathan and Andrew care so much for each other.”

They kissed each other under the porch, while the wild clematis on it played its trembling shadows over their faces.

Jonathan and Andrew looked at each other without speaking. They had seen it.

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